

# Superintendent Procedure 2331SP **Controversial Issues and Guest Speakers**



Approved by: s/ Larry Nyland Date: 11/21/17

Dr. Larry Nyland, Superintendent

## **Purpose**

Educating informed and reflective citizens is a part of the core mission of the Seattle Public Schools. The instructional program shall respect the right of students to face issues, to have free access to information, to study under educators in situations free from prejudice and to form, hold, and express their own opinions without personal prejudice or discrimination. In exercising their academic freedom, care must be taken by staff members to avoid the appearance of imposing their views upon students. The district encourages staff members to provide for the free and orderly flow and examination of ideas so that students may gain the skills to gather and arrange facts, discriminate between facts and opinion, discuss differing viewpoints, analyze problems and draw their own tentative conclusions.

## **I. Controversial Issues**

### **A. Preparation**

Prior to the teaching or discussion of issues that are partisan or considered to be controversial to a large portion of the school community, the staff member:

1. Exercises professional judgment in determining the alignment of the issue to the curriculum and course standards and the appropriateness to the maturity of the students.
2. Undertakes the presentation of a controversial issue to students only after careful study and planning.
3. Determines whether the discussion would reflect adversely upon persons because of their sex (gender); race; creed; color; religion; ancestry; national origin; age; economic status; sexual orientation including gender expression or identity; pregnancy; marital status; physical appearance; the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability; honorably discharged veteran or military status; or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability.
4. Confers with the principal or designee if there is doubt regarding the appropriateness of discussing a controversial issue.

### **B. Conduct**

In the teaching or discussion of controversial issues, the staff member:

1. Ensures an atmosphere has been created in which students feel free to express opinions and to respectfully challenge ideas.

2. Teaches respect for the opinions of others and develops skills of critical thinking.
3. Chooses suitable instructional materials presenting data or perspectives on varying points of view on issues being discussed.
4. Does not use his/her position to forward his/her own religious, political, economic or social bias. In exercising his/her academic freedom, the staff member may express a personal opinion if he/she clearly identifies it as such and does not express the opinion for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view. Staff members always should be mindful of the role they play as influencers of student thought and should make efforts to ensure students with opposing viewpoints to their own still feel welcomed and respected.

## **II. Guest speakers**

Prior to the appearance of a guest speaker, the following steps will be taken by school staff.

- A. All guest speakers are to be invited with the knowledge and approval of the principal or designee at least seven (7) calendar days prior to the guest speaker's intended appearance. Upon review of information on the proposed speaker, the principal will make a decision to approve or disapprove and notify the staff member in writing.
- B. The staff member is responsible for fully researching the background of invited speakers.
- C. If the staff member and the principal believe the guest speaker's topic is partisan or controversial to large portions of the community, they will develop a plan whereby the issue(s) can be presented in an objective and unbiased manner. Principals will notify their respective Executive Director of Schools if they expect any potential disagreement about the decision to host the speaker and may consult with the EDS if other questions arise.
- D. In the event the speaker or speaker's topic is determined to be controversial, the staff member must notify parents/guardians and students in writing of the topic and speaker beforehand. Notification will also include information regarding an option for students not to attend the presentation. A meaningful alternative assignment or activity will be provided to students choosing not to attend.
- E. The staff member must ascertain that the selection of speakers and topics is appropriate to the age and grade level of the students.
- F. The selection of speakers and topics should be congruent with the curriculum and standards of the course or function and purpose of the activity or program.
- G. The staff member must retain primary responsibility for the instruction and supervision of students when using an outside speaker. The staff member must be present at all times when speakers are in the classroom.
- H. The staff member and/or principal shall ask the guest speaker to leave should the speaker begin to cause a disruption to the educational program and/or no longer serve the purpose expressed at the beginning of this procedure.

Approved: November 2017

Revised:

Cross Reference: School Board Policy No. 2331, 2023, 4200