

POLICY

Harford County Public Schools

POLICY TITLE: CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES		
ADOPTION/EFFECTIVE DATE: May 6, 2002	MOST RECENTLY AMENDED:	MOST RECENTLY REAFFIRMED:
POLICY/PROCEDURE MANUAL SUMMARY CATEGORY: Instruction		

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set forth the position and philosophy of the Board of Education (BOE) regarding controversial issues, and to provide clear and specific guidance to support our educators in managing those issues.

II. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. **Controversial issues:** A controversial issue means a subject or matter about which there are significant differences of opinion.
- B. **Bias:** An inclination or prejudice for or against an idea, person, or group, especially when it compromises fairness and objectivity.
- C. **Neutral:** Allowing for differing opinions without expressing one's own; considering opinions without bias.
- D. **Age appropriate:** activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally-appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group.

III. Statement of Policy

- A. In providing for the study and discussion of such issues, the school system strives to maintain a balanced, non-biased, and neutral position. Instructional materials and discussion must present all viewpoints objectively and appropriately for student age and maturity and must clearly differentiate facts from opinions, theories, and ideas.
- B. Controversial issues should be avoided in Elementary Schools. Should a controversial issue arise, educators should distract and refer students to parents for clarification. Using this policy as guidance, educators are trained and trusted to exercise professional judgment when controversial issues are presented and

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discussed in secondary school classrooms. Using their training, educators shall consider the level of maturity of the students and the sensitivity and age-appropriateness of the topic. Such study shall be objective and scholarly, allowing students the opportunity to collect and assemble factual information on the subject, to interpret the data without prejudice, to reconsider assumptions and claims, and to reach personal conclusions. Students must be encouraged to search after truth as well as to form, express, and justify personal views in controversial issues.

C. Educators have the following obligations in reference to discussing controversial issues:

- i. to assist students in achieving a scholarly competence,
- ii. to teach factual information and concepts upon which truth is based,
- iii. to help students develop a respect for factual knowledge as the basis for critical thought,
- iv. to ensure avoid that the discussion of issues or topics are age appropriate and align with the comprehension ability and maturity of students,
- v. to lead students to recognize opinions, theories, and ideas in instructional materials and that some problems and issues escape solution,
- vi. to demonstrate a deep respect for the dignity of each student and his/her right to express opinions without jeopardizing relationships with the teachers of the school,
- vii. to act as neutral moderators in the event of student disagreement.

D. Educators should not express their own opinions regarding controversial issues and shall ensure that students have been permitted the opportunity to assess facts and draw their own conclusions. Educators shall clearly differentiate between facts and opinions, ideas, or theories in discussions and in instructional materials and welcome and respect differing opinions.

E. If a lesson would be benefitted by the educator's use of a personal opinion as an example or to generate discussions, the educator may not express personal opinions regarding controversial issues, provided the educator presents such views and alternate views in accordance with this policy and provided the educator makes it clear that any opinion statement represents his/her opinion only. Educators will guard against biased discussions sharing personal opinions and will use professional judgement to decide when an opinion can be used and when staying remain neutral can and help to empower students to make judgements on their own.

F. School personnel should avoid political activities during school hours and should minimize any distraction or potential social pressure which may occur from focusing on controversial issues and biased opinions, as these may cause stress, learning loss, and affect student's ability to concentrate and complete coursework.

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G. Adherence to Legal Requirements

This policy is intended to be consistent with all applicable laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Title IX, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). Ensuring students' and parents' rights and privacy is vital for fostering a safe and supportive learning environment.

All HCPS employees shall not:

- (1) engage in the collection of sensitive personal and psychological information about students without first providing requisite notice and obtaining advanced written consent from parents/guardians
- (2) compel students to engage in speech they might sincerely disagree with
- (3) conceal and information from parents and guardians.

Any staff member administering a questionnaire or survey or requesting personal information that violates the PPRA would be acting outside of the scope of his or her authority. This includes any prompting by staff for students to announce their pronouns. Staff and students may declare their preferred pronouns if they so choose.

HCPS will continue to provide relevant training on laws impacting students and families, specifically including the PPRA and FERPA, and will continue to enforce legal compliance on laws impacting students and families, specifically including the PPRA and FERPA.

H. Training on this policy shall be provided to all HCPS staff members upon hire, with bi-annual updates provided, including consequences of staff policy violations.

Board Approval Acknowledged By:

Sean W. Bulson, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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Policy Action Dates		
ACTION	DATE	ACTION DATE
Reaffirmed	5/12/1980	
Reaffirmed	10/26/1998	
Reaffirmed	5/6/2002	

Responsibility for Policy Maintenance & References	
LAST EDITOR/DRAFTER NAME: Kimberly Neal, Esquire	JOB POSITION OF LAST EDITOR/DRAFTER: General Counsel
PERSON RESPONSIBLE:	JOB POSITION OF PERSON RESPONSIBLE:
DESIGNEE NAME:	JOB POSITION OF DESIGNEE:
POLICY NUMBER PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 1, 2005:	

LEGAL REFERENCES¹

References are set forth in the Policy.

¹ All references are to specific federal or Maryland statutes or regulations. References are provided for convenience and informational purposes only and are not to be considered as exhaustive or as precluding Harford County Public Schools from relying upon any other statutes or regulations in support of a policy or procedure.