MARK ARMIJO ACADEMY

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES POLICY

1. **Policy Statement**

The Board of Education recognizes the role of public education in preparing students for effective citizenship. Consequently, the instructional program developed to achieve this purpose must appropriately emphasize cultural heritage, critical thinking, and the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of living in a pluralistic society. The Board also recognizes that as students prepare for active engagement in participatory democracy, they often encounter issues that may be considered controversial. The Board of Education encourages the examination of controversial issues related to Board approved curricula in an impartial and objective manner. The examination of controversial issues should occur in inclusive and supportive learning environments that encourage respect for multiple perspectives. The Board also encourages community stakeholders, students, school system employees, parents, service providers, and each member of the community to support the teaching of controversial issues in the classroom in order to promote the development of civic efficacy, student engagement, and critical thinking among our students.

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the teaching of controversial issues.

1. **Definitions**

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

1. Citizenship – Having the right to participate in and to be represented in politics and for the purpose of this document refers to both global and national politics.
2. Controversial Issues – Significant academic, social, political, and ideological matters about which there exists opposing viewpoints and/or multiple perspectives.
3. Curriculum – The prescribed elements of programs and courses which state clearly and specifically what students are to know and be able to do, how well they will be able to do it, how they will meet the learning objectives and by what means they will be assessed. Sensitive and controversial issue topics are components of the curriculum.
4. Objective – Not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.
5. Participatory Democracy – A process within which citizens either make decisions on policy and/or elect representatives in order to make laws and decisions on policy and implement those decisions.
6. Perspectives – A point of view; a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something.
7. Sensitive Issues – A resolved historical fact such as the Holocaust and slavery that must be addressed in a manner that supports a safe learning environment for students.
8. Third Party – Parents, mentors, volunteers, vendors, contractors, and others with whom students or employees interact during school or school-related activities.
9. **Standards**
10. A controversial issue may be addressed in the classroom when the following conditions are met:
    1. The issue has political, economic, cultural, or social significance and is presented within curricular guidelines.
    2. Teachers have communicated to students how to practice civil discourse.
    3. Students are provided access to relevant and credible information pertaining to the issue under study.
    4. Students are able to form and express their own opinions on the issue without jeopardizing their relationships with teachers or the school.
11. Controversial issues must be presented as follows:
    1. In an age appropriate manner.
    2. With a goal of encouraging discussion and building mutual understanding of the topic.
    3. With access to and respect for multiple perspectives and sources that are founded in relevant and credible information.
    4. In a learning environment that is safe, supportive, inclusive, and focused on an academic examination of the issue.
    5. In alignment with the school system’s curriculum, mission, and vision.
12. A sensitive issue may be related to a controversial issue or may lead to a discussion about a controversial issue. Therefore, sensitive issues should be addressed in accordance with standards and curriculum.
13. The use of resource speakers in teaching controversial issues is permitted.
14. Teachers will teach controversial issues in an objective and impartial manner. Teachers who have concerns about presenting a controversial issue will seek assistance from a supervisor about methods for facilitating a discussion.
15. School-based procedures will be developed for approving controversial issues to be considered in the classroom.
16. **Responsibilities**
17. The School Leader/designee will ensure that students, parents, employees, and third parties are notified of the provisions of this policy annually.
18. Teachers will present information in an objective manner, ensure multiple perspectives are represented, model citizenship and maintain adherence.
19. The School Leader/designee will provide assistance, advice, and training with regard to the teaching of controversial issues.