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## **I-009: Teaching About Controversial Issues**

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Approved by: Governing Council

Effective Date: June 13, 2005

Revision Date(s): March 23, 2026 TBD

Reviewed On: March 23, 2026 TBD

### **I. Teaching and Learning About Controversial Issues**

East Mountain respects the tremendous power of American thought that stresses the free exchange of ideas as a vital element of our democracy and supports the free and thorough consideration of debatable issues as one way to accomplish this goal.

Instruction that emphasizes deep thinking and the development of informed opinions based on established facts is encouraged and supported at all grade levels. Instruction in critical thinking and respectful civil discourse has an important place in the East Mountain curriculum and course offerings. Teaching should be objective and scholarly, with an emphasis on factual accuracy and regular opportunities for discussion of student perspectives at a developmentally appropriate level.

Regarding the instructional program, East Mountain recognizes the authority of the State of New Mexico to establish guidelines for curriculum and standards. East Mountain High School commits to following all applicable state laws, rules, and Public Education Department requirements.

East Mountain embraces the concept that public schools must teach students the full and comprehensive history of the United States so they can make responsible decisions, avoid the mistakes of the past, and prepare to become contributing and engaged citizens in our democracy.

Recognizing the importance of developing independence of thought, students at East Mountain have the following rights:

- The right to study any issue that has political, economic, or social significance at an age-appropriate level as they develop personal viewpoints
- The right to have free access to relevant non-confidential and age-appropriate information
- The right to express opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing relationships with teachers, fellow students, or the school
- The right to learn under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice

All students deserve an education that helps them understand who they are and where they come from, and that gives them the confidence and skills to work and learn constructively with others — regardless of background, identity, or circumstance.

East Mountain students should have the freedom to learn the full story of America, including both our nation's achievements and the times when it has fallen short of its ideals. An honest and comprehensive education prepares students to address the challenges of the future.

Consistent with state standards, the East Mountain curriculum includes instruction in United States government, civics, and history. Study may include examination of how intolerance, bigotry, antisemitism, and other forms of hatred and discrimination have developed historically and how such forces can lead to

mass violence, as well as how democratic institutions and civic responsibility can prevent these outcomes.

## II. Instructional Practices for Controversial Topics

In implementing an approved curriculum, East Mountain teachers are expected to use the following best practices when addressing controversial or debatable issues:

- The teacher presents a course syllabus that includes key topics and course expectations to both students and families.
- The teacher ensures that any controversial subject discussed is relevant to the curriculum, aligned to state standards, and meaningful for students' learning.
- The teacher presents material in ways that encourage critical analysis and the development of evidence-based perspectives.
- The teacher strives to present a balanced exploration of multiple viewpoints while maintaining fidelity to established facts and historical accuracy.
- The teacher promotes open-minded inquiry, respectful dialogue, and civil discourse.
- The teacher emphasizes the importance of evaluating credible evidence, examining claims carefully, and being willing to revise one's perspective when new information emerges.

## III. GUIDELINES TO PROCESS STUDENT AND/OR GUARDIAN CONCERNS

- A. A student and/or guardian with concerns about the instructional assignments, content or materials should first schedule a meeting with the teacher to attempt to resolve the issue. Students should not be exempted from the entire class but may be excused from participation in specific topics or lessons that are contrary to fundamental religious or personal beliefs. The following steps should be taken:
  1. The student and/or guardian should schedule a meeting with the teacher to discuss the concerns.
  2. The teacher should communicate the relevant charter goals, curricular content, and standards and benchmarks to the guardian.
  3. The student and/or guardian should be provided a copy of the materials, or directed to where such materials can be obtained, so the guardian can review them.
  4. The student and/or guardian should complete a [Challenge Form](#) indicating guardian objections to the assigned materials, and provide the completed form to the teacher.
  5. The student and/or guardian and teacher should review the guardian's objections, assigned materials, and curriculum and come to an agreement that specifically identifies what areas or topics to exempt the student, and what alternative assignment(s) will meet these standards.
  6. If the student and/or guardian is not satisfied with the teacher's proposed resolution of the issue, the guardian may address his/her concerns to the Principal, The Principal will render a decision and advise the student and/or guardian and the teacher.
- B. Concerns about library-media materials should be addressed to the Principal by scheduling an informal meeting to discuss concerns. The Principal will render a decision and advise the guardian.