

Guidance for Addressing Challenging/Sensitive Topics about the Middle East

Ensuring safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments for our students, families, and staff is always a top priority. The Los Angeles Unified School District has issued a series of Policy Bulletins, Memoranda, and Reference Guides that address potentially sensitive issues in curriculum (e.g., religion, politics, appropriateness of audio/visual materials, etc.). Additionally, the History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools is clear on how teachers should address current events. It states that current issues should be addressed through the lens of historical perspective. Thus, District employees must maintain neutrality when addressing current and/or sensitive issues in educational settings, while ensuring the content and pedagogy are developmentally appropriate and aligned to California State Standards.

As we continue to instruct our students in an ever-changing and often volatile world, LA Unified employees are required to both review and abide by all District policies. Please see responses to frequently asked questions and links to instructional resources that apply to many topics including but not limited to those specifically delineated below:

Given the importance of maintaining a safe and welcoming school environment, is it appropriate for District staff to share their political affiliations and opinions with students?
<p>LA Unified is tasked with delivering instruction that, while providing inquiry-driven opportunities for students to grapple with potentially contentious issues, is based on District and state education policy, and appropriate grade level content standards, focused on developing students' critical thinking skills.</p> <p>Moreover, given the position of authority a certificated employee holds in the classroom, a professional stance of neutrality on topics such as politics is crucial to avoid perceptions of bias, and concerns regarding the overall inclusiveness of diverse subject matters during instructional time.</p> <p>Given this awareness, instructional resources addressing historical and contemporary issues have been provided to our employees through content-appropriate Schoology Groups.</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUL-5479.2 Guidelines for Teaching About Religions • Board Policy on Political Activities • BUL-145709 Selection and Review Policy for School Instructional Materials • Code of Conduct with Students • Office of Student Civil Rights • Human Relations, Diversity and Equity / Home • BUL-5688.2 Social Media Policy for Employees and Associated Persons
What is antisemitism?
<p>While the term antisemitism may be encountered in specific curriculum areas, the History Social-Science Framework for California Public Schools and the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum highlight numerous entry points for instruction to address it as both a concept and connection to historical events.</p> <p>The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum provides the following definition,</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Antisemitism is “the belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.” (CDE Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, p 364)</p>

Resources:

- [Instructional Resources that Address Antisemitism](#)
 - o For additional instructional materials, please see the resources section of the History-Social Science and Ethnic Studies Schoology Groups (access codes below)
 - o Elementary History-Social Science Schoology Group: MD2GC-8F8DK
 - o Middle School History-Social Science Schoology Group: KS4JV-TW7XR
 - o High School History-Social Science Schoology Group: 6TR5R-Z87FC
 - o Ethnic Studies Schoology Group: CKX5-ZC7X-HHCG4

What is anti-Muslim and/or Islamophobia?

The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum contains a definition of Islamophobia, which defines it as an: Irrational fear and strong dislike of anyone who is, or is perceived to be, Muslim. The District is committed to respecting all individuals, actively educating against discriminatory behavior, and celebrating diverse cultures.

Resources:

- [Stereotypes, Media, and Islamophobia](#): Facing History and Ourselves
- [Countering Islamophobia](#): Learning for Justice

How can instruction effectively incorporate diverse and often opposing viewpoints in the classroom?

As mentioned previously, the District is committed to respecting all individuals and actively educating against disrespectful behavior while also celebrating diverse cultures.

In addition, the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum provides guidance via the section entitled *In-Class Community Building*, which includes the following key points for teachers to effectively engage students in productive conversations and learning activities around difficult and important issues as well as grade level appropriate content standards:

- **Clear conversation norms:** Teachers need to establish norms based on best practices that prevent the trivialization of sensitive or traumatizing topics. These norms should encourage empathetic listening and uphold the District's expectations of respect. While encouraging diverse perspectives is important, intolerant or hateful views should not be permitted. The focus should remain on promoting deeper learning and reflective dialogue that aligns with the scope and objectives of the course.
- **Subject matter expertise and curiosity:** Teachers should have a sufficient understanding of the topic to provide basic context, select diverse and authentic readings, and approach the discussion with curiosity while acknowledging the limitations of their own knowledge.
- **Student-centered insights:** Understanding students' backgrounds and being able to draw out their questions, perspectives, and critical thinking is key. Teachers must also help students appreciate the insights, wisdom, and moral courage within themselves and others.
- **Preparation for challenges:** Anticipating challenges and having strategies, resources, and mentors ready can help when students express confusion, disengagement, misconceptions, or even prejudices and hurtful comments. It should also be noted that care should be taken when selecting, or responding to, some topics as they may trigger emotional distress or can be traumatic for some students. Additionally, the teacher should foster discussions grounded in empathy for all learners, while avoiding any judgment or blame based on students' ancestry.

- **Reflective practice and collaboration:** Teachers need to be aware of their own learning process and have access to colleagues who can engage in inquiry alongside them, helping to articulate questions and insights that stimulate further thinking.
- **Mindfulness of bias:** Teachers should carefully monitor their own political views and potential biases, ensuring that students are encouraged to develop their own informed opinions rather than simply adopting those of the teacher or selected materials.

Resources:

- [Office of Student Civil Rights / Code of Conduct with Students](#): Includes the LAUSD Student Bill of Rights with topics such as Access and Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity, as well as Free Expression
- [CDE Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum](#)
- [CDE Model Curriculum for Human Rights and Genocide](#)
- [CDE HSS Framework for California Public Schools](#)
- [Historical Thinking Skills Chart](#): Digital Inquiry Group
- [Human Relations, Diversity and Equity](#): Please go to HRDE and select *Resources*
- [Discussion Guidelines | Teaching + Learning Lab](#): Includes discussion guidelines useful for UTK-12
- [LAUSD Partnership Resources | Discovery Education](#): Numerous UTK-12 resources available
- [Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy](#)

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