






Independent School District 152

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Use of Racial Epithets and Marginalizing Language

Administrative Procedure: 105.1

Section: 100 School District

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There is a growing understanding that the utterance, saying, speaking, or use of racial epithets (slurs) and marginalizing language in the classroom or school environment creates an environment harmful to student learning and development and a potentially hostile work environment for employees. This procedure does not preemptively prohibit any language, but provides clarification that in some situations, use of marginalizing language can create a hostile environment that violates the district policies about discrimination, harassment, and equal opportunity. The purpose of this guidance is to clarify under what circumstances the use of marginalizing language may and may not be considered a violation of policy and could create a hostile environment.

Classroom and Instructional Environment

In order to fulfill our educational mission, we must, from time to time, confront sensitive topics, including the use of harmful language. At the same time, it is the responsibility of instructors to practice sound pedagogy in ensuring that the use of epithets(slurs) and marginalizing language does not create a learning environment hostile to those within it, whether by causing harm, threatening harm, or undermining the teaching and learning enterprise.

Some pedagogical practices that help mitigate the potentially harmful effects of contending with epithets(slurs) and marginalizing language include:

A. Making students aware in advance that they will encounter such language in texts, films, or audio artifacts under consideration.

B. Using substitute terms, such as socially acceptable euphemisms such as “the n-word,” for example, in place of the epithet when discussing such terms or when reading aloud from or quoting texts in which epithets or marginalizing language is used, both in speech and in writing.

C. Engaging students in a discussion of the harms associated with the gratuitous use of such terms.

D. Immediately and decisively responding to the gratuitous or intentionally hostile use of such language when it occurs in the classroom.

Describing what would be considered a hostile learning environment is difficult because each situation will inevitably include various factors. Generally, however, the use of epithets and marginalizing language—that is, the use of such language without a clear and pressing pedagogical imperative—is highly likely to undermine teaching effectively and create a justifiable sense of hostility in the classroom.

Likewise, there are some actions and behaviors that would not automatically be seen as constitutive of a hostile learning environment, without some aggravating factor.

These situations included:

- A. Teaching topics connected to an epithet or marginalizing language.
- B. Conducting scholarship on epithets or marginalizing language.
- C. Assigning texts, films, audio archives, or other material that contain epithets or marginalizing language.
- D. Engaging students in a discussion of classroom expectations about and the ethics of the use of epithets and marginalizing language.
- E. Taking part in or directing a performance or historical re-enactment in which an epithet or marginalizing language is used by a character.

General

The District takes incidents very seriously when individuals use epithets(slurs) or marginalized language against other students, families, staff members or members of the community.

This includes spreading rumors, jokes, notes, stories, drawings, pictures or gestures that make reference to real or perceived ethnicity, national origin, immigrant status,

religious belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, political affiliation, manner of speech, or any other physical or cultural characteristics.

Individuals who have witnessed or reported to have directed slurs or marginalized language towards any other individual at school or at a school-related activity may be subject to disciplinary action.

Definitions

Hostile learning environment

A hostile learning environment is an environment that is difficult or uncomfortable for a student to learn in because of discrimination or discriminatory harassment.

Discrimination

Discrimination is invidious, unlawful or adverse conduct that perpetuates inequities against people with protected characteristics.

Discriminatory Harassment (Non-Sex-Based)

Harassment based on any of characteristics described in the district's non-discrimination statement policy. Discriminatory harassment is conduct related to one of these characteristics when such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or educational performance or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment for work or learning.

Epithet and Marginalizing Language

Slurs, insults, and historically harmful terms used to describe, harm, and degrade members of identity groups with protected characteristics listed in the district's Non-Discrimination Statement. Typically, such language carries the implicit threat of violence or harm, whatever the intentions of its users might be.

Slur

Speech, for example, epithets, threats, verbal abuse, use of profanity or derogatory comments that make reference to real or perceived ethnicity, national origin, immigrant status, religious belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, political affiliation, manner of speech, or any other physical or cultural characteristics.

Pedagogical Imperative

A need dictated by the stated outcomes of the course, activity, or assignment and

aligned with the disciplinary conventions or standards within which the learning takes place.