



Referendum 74 is impacting Washington students.

**Your student's deserve access to information,
a caring and safe learning environment
and your support.**

[Safe Schools Coalition](#) can help.

Why is this important in my classroom?

Your students need information: Election season is always a great time for teaching about how our system of democracy works and exploring important issues of our times. Many students have questions about the referendum messages they're hearing from the media, peers and political leaders. You can help them by providing age-appropriate opportunities to make sense of the issues, work past stereotypes and misconceptions, think about diversity and fairness, develop their personal ethics and practice civil dialogue. This learning is important to young people's healthy development and is key preparation for citizenship in democratic society.

Your students need a caring, safe learning climate: Educators and students from other states report increased bullying and harassment during (and after) similar campaigns.¹ To safeguard a positive learning environment, your vigilance is crucial. Respond *every time* to anti-gay, racial and anti-immigrant slurs and other bias incidents; insist on respectful treatment of everyone. Help young people learn to take their own stands against bias and bullying and get adult help when they need it.

Your students need support: These campaign times are especially stressful for people who are hearing hurtful and hostile messages about themselves and their loved ones in election ads and public discussions.^{1,2} Demonstrating your concern can make a big difference. Research shows that having supportive adults at school is a critical factor for students to feel safe, do well and graduate.³



What if I'm not so sure about Referendum 74 myself?

As an educator, you're committed to well-being and success for young people. No matter what your personal views, you can make sure your students have access to fair and accurate information and opportunities for dialog. Please join with us to provide a safe space for students to bring forward their questions and feelings, explore the issues and deepen their own values and ethics.



The Safe
Schools
Coalition

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www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Sources: 1. Levitt, H. et al (2009) GLBT Experience in a Time of Anti-GLBT Legislation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(1), 67-81 2. Prop 8 Hurt my Family (2009) <http://www.marriageequality.org> 3. Darwich, L., Hymel, S. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning Adolescents: Victimization, Belonging, Safety and the Role of Supportive Adults in High School" <http://www.education.com/reference/article/lesbian-gay-bullying/>.

What steps can I take to support students?



Teach about the election, including Referendum 74. Online voters' guide: www.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives.aspx While students are being bombarded with election sound bites, they need help to understand the deeper issues of representation, freedom and equality at stake. Provide opportunities and a supportive environment for their critical thinking about voting and election issues. With all students:

- Find out what they already know, what they are thinking and where they are getting their information.
- Help them ask questions, examine multiple perspectives and shape their own views.
- Support students' self-expression and coach them in respectful dialogue.
- See safeschoolscoalition.org for guidance about teachers' roles, plus techniques and lesson plans for teaching about elections and other sensitive issues in the classroom.



Step up anti-bullying efforts. Students need *explicit* messages and skill development to stop bullying and develop prosocial behaviors. Given the increased bullying during these campaigns in other states, now is a crucial time for this work.

- *Explicitly* prohibit racial, gender, anti-gay, and other identity slurs. Make clear that it's never acceptable to use language that puts people down for who they are, who's in their family, or who their friends are. Intervene *every* time.
- Establish norms against bullying, harassing and cyberbullying; revisit behavior expectations often. Teach about harassment and bullying: what it is, the harm it does, and strategies to respond to it-including expectations and options for bystanders, how to report/get help, etc.
- Plan learning experiences that foster empathy, reduce bias and bias-bullying, and build young people's skills to make a positive difference.
- Promote skills for healthy, caring relationships.
- Regularly check-in with students. Tailor your efforts to their experiences.
- Find ways to work with families and the larger community to prevent bias and bullying.



Teach about diversity. Emphasize empathy, respect. Students need accurate information about human differences and everyone's right to fair treatment.

- Demonstrate inclusiveness, caring and valuing of all students and families. Model the behaviors you want to see!
- Explore the identities and backgrounds that shape us all, including: race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion, disability, class, sexual orientation, national origin, family, etc. Affirm individuals' uniqueness and complexity, as well as people's commonalities and connections.
- Use books, current events, arts, activities and teachable moments to open dialogue, broaden awareness, foster critical thinking about bias and inequality, and encourage working together for better communities.
- Start young! Research concludes that early anti-bias work is best. Pre-K and elementary children are already forming their life-long dispositions toward diversity, fairness, and they need adult guidance.

Where can I get more resources, lesson ideas?

Visit **The Safe Schools Coalition** at www.safeschoolscoalition.org to find (and recommend) resources and lessons for K-12 classrooms. There's information for teaching about elections, controversial topics in the classroom, bias and bullying prevention, and more. Safe Schools Coalition can also provide: facilitators for staff development, training, and presentations for your students.