

The research and presentations are over, hands are raised, it is time to count. Social studies teacher Curtis White tallies the hands for and against Donald Trump's immigration ban that was released on January 27. About half of his class rested in the middle, weighing both sides of the policy. White got his students to address all sides of the issue, something that remains unseen by many teachers.

It all started with a safety pin. A safety pin that both was and was not a "political statement." A safety pin that showed openness to some or offense to others, and the safety pin spawned from the immigration ban. The tiny object led to arguments at school board meetings, as well as calls and emails district wide. White wore a safety pin up until the email that puzzled many. The plastic pin he wore on his collar showed he was welcome to refugees, Muslims, the LGBT community and each and every one of his students.

"I guess teachers that were not wearing safety pins were made to feel that they weren't welcoming," social studies teacher Brenda Fishman said. "And of course most teachers are here because we are welcoming and open."

Parents at the school board meeting stood up to the administration for the teachers who wanted to show their students that they were always welcome at school. The recommendation that teachers not wear a safety pin remained the same.

"For me, I see it as no threat at all. I don't see it as political," White said. "I think it's something that democrats can wear, republicans can wear and you have your right to speak your mind."

The controversy caused many social studies classes to weigh that and the immigration policy, but it wasn't the beginning of political discussions within the classroom. Every three weeks Fishman collected current events compiled of articles, editorials and political cartoons. She tried to push her students to understand the opposing opinions through the editorial portion rather than only reading opinions similar to their own.

"What I did not understand before this election was that the computer remembers what sites you've gone to and tends to give you that information back again," Fishman said. "So you're getting pretty much what you want to see and what you think you already know, and you don't necessarily see the other side."

While some teachers at East chose not to hide their political standpoints, White and Fishman felt strongly that their students should form their own opinions, and not be affected by what their superior believes.

"I think as a teacher I feel really uncomfortable when my class is one sided," White said. "I want to be the devil's advocate, and I want to bring the other position into play so they can think about that and contemplate that because if that's never done then your ideas are never challenged."

As another teacher once said to White, 'We're all ignorant, we're all insecure and we're all prejudice,' and White believed that must be understood before students were ready to learn.