

Studying Controversial Issues

The district shall offer courses of study appropriate to the level of student understanding. The instructional program shall respect the right of students to discuss controversial issues, to learn to analyze problems, to gather and sort facts, to assess facts and opinions and to draw conclusions.

The criteria for determining the appropriateness of controversial issues for the curriculum shall be:

1. The topics selected for study must contribute to the achievement of the major objectives of the curriculum;
2. The topics will be considered appropriate and acceptable areas of study by most students and patrons of the community;
3. No issue involving indoctrination of religious belief will be included in class discussions or in the curriculum. This should not prevent or discourage the teaching of religions as an educational reality, the comparison or the study of the influence of religions upon our society, our country's values (institutions, ideals, customs) or those of other societies;
4. Questions treated will come within the range of the knowledge, maturity and competence of the particular students involved;
5. Problems and issues selected for discussion and study will be current, significant and of interest to students;
6. Materials should be available on all sides of the issue which will yield a reasonable amount of data;
7. The issues studied will be allotted only that amount of time required for a satisfactory study by the class.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Student

1. Students have a right to study and discuss controversial issues and problems in a class atmosphere devoid of partisanship and bias.
2. Students have the responsibility to learn and practice the techniques of participatory democracy in preparation for carrying out the duties of intelligent, involved citizens.
3. Students have a right to an explanation by the teacher if an issue is not to be studied.

4. Students have a responsibility to undertake the study of all sides of an issue, to listen to other viewpoints with an open mind and to evaluate issues on an intellectual, rather than emotional basis.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Teacher

1. The teacher will determine whether the issue raised is to be considered at the moment, whether there will be time to explore the issue sufficiently, what the relation of the problem to be considered is to the course or the curriculum, whether the students are prepared or ready to study the issue and whether the teacher is prepared to discuss and present it effectively.
2. The students will be instructed in the importance of the reason for considering controversial issues. If an issue is not to be studied, the teacher has an obligation to explain the reasons for not doing so.
3. The teacher, as a moderator and a participant, will point out the possibility of errors in statements of students and writers and the possibility of alternative points of view. The teacher will see that facts, evidence and aspects of an issue are honestly presented and that students are helped to evaluate their sources of data as well as their own rationale and conclusions.
4. Teachers have the right to express their opinions provided the students understand it is an opinion and not an authoritative answer. Teachers will not attempt to limit or control the judgment of students, directly or indirectly, and they must avoid indoctrination.
5. The teacher has a right to protection from pressures that demand withholding of important facts.
6. The teacher will uphold, protect and defend the fundamental freedoms of our American democratic way of life.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Administration

1. A teacher who is in doubt about the appropriateness of discussing certain controversial issues in the classroom or regarding his/her ability to explore such issues will confer with the principal. If principal and teacher are unable to agree, the matter will be referred to the superintendent.
2. No group or individual has the right, without authorization, to present arguments for or against any issue under study directly to students or to the class. The teacher, however, after obtaining approval of the principal, may invite representatives of different viewpoints to appear before the class to discuss their opinions.

Controversial Issues Approval

1. Before commencing a class containing an obviously or potentially controversial topic, a teacher will complete the Controversial Issues Guidelines for Teacher Response Form and discuss with the principal:
 - a. Its appropriateness to the course;
 - b. Its appropriateness for the students' maturity level;
 - c. The approach to instruction;

- d. The instructional materials to be used.
2. If approved, the teacher will notify in writing each student's parent or guardian so that those who do not wish to have their student attend the presentation may request a comparable, alternative activity of similar academic rigor and instructional value.
3. In the event no parental response is forthcoming, the student shall retain his/her right to attend the presentation or perform an appropriate alternative assignment in accordance with his/her expressed choice.
4. If the principal denies permission to include the topic, he/she shall give the teacher the reasons for doing so. Should a teacher feel that his/her academic freedom has been abridged, he/she is encouraged to follow the district's grievance procedure.

Controversial Issues Guidelines for Teacher Response

Respond to the following questions prior to discussing your controversial issues request with the principal.

Group to hear topic: _____

Topic to be presented: _____

Date(s) and time of presentation: _____

1. Explain how the issue is pertinent to the objectives of the course.
2. Explain how your students have been intellectually and emotionally prepared to deal with the issue.
3. What background do you have to deal with this issue?
4. What procedures for exploring the issue have been established?
5. List the materials you plan to use for exploration and examination of the issue.
6. How will you provide for a free exchange of ideas and conflicting views?
7. Outline an alternative activity for those students who do not wish to discuss the topic. What provisions for monitoring those students have been made.

Your name: _____

Date: _____

Teacher's signature: _____

Principal's signature: _____

Permission granted: _____

Denied: _____