

Studying Controversial Issues

The teaching of controversial issues requires the recognition of responsibilities: by the teacher to students, by the principal to MESD, and by MESD to the community.

The teacher will adhere to the following guidelines

1. The issue should be within the framework of MESD's philosophy and the program in the subject area;
2. The issue should be within the level of the student's emotional, intellectual and social maturity;
3. The discussion should contribute significantly to developing the skills of critical thinking and problem solving;
4. Teaching strategies should be objective so that all sides of the issue are explored;
5. Suitable materials, including facts and concepts of all aspects of the issue should be available.

Discuss with the Superintendent or designee the appropriateness of the controversial topic to the course and students' maturity level. Also discuss the approach and materials to be used;

6. The principal will be informed of all teaching of controversial issues in the school.

Based on the teacher guidelines above, the principal will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Approve or disapprove the teaching of controversial issues which are not a part of MESD curriculum;
2. Request purchase approval from the Superintendent or designee for books and instructional materials required for student use which deal with controversial subjects or issues and are not listed in MESD's catalog of recommended instructional materials.

The use of any controversial text or video materials must have written approval from the direct supervisor or building administrator.

Criteria for Selection for Controversial Materials

In determining whether to present a controversial issue in class, teachers will consider these questions:

1. Is the topic significant or related to a persistent problem so that the information acquired will be of continuing usefulness?
2. Is the topic within the emotional, intellectual and social capacities of students?
3. Is the topic of importance, relevance and interest to the students?
4. Are adequate and appropriate materials and/or personnel available to present opposing sides of the issues?
5. Will this issue clash with community customs and attitudes? If so, can the issue be studied and discussed reasonably?
6. Is there adequate time to develop the topic effectively?
7. What are the existing Board policies concerning this issue?

Requirements

1. Topics will be discussed only if they are within published and approved scope and sequence and course outlines.
2. Books, films or materials required to pass courses and for which alternative assignments will not be provided must receive prior approval of building principal or designee.
3. If potentially objectionable concepts or language are present in materials, alternative selections must be made available to students who object or whose parents object to the content.
4. Parents will be informed in advance regarding controversial issues discussed in courses either through course outlines or by special issues, and will be afforded the opportunity to withhold the student without penalty.
5. Reasonable requests from parents to view materials will be honored.

Appropriate Practices

1. When facts are presented by teacher or students, sources should be cited.
2. One person should not be permitted to dominate the discussion.
3. Separate fact from opinion.
4. Permit freedom of expression.
5. Give a thorough, objective introduction.
6. Withhold personal opinion except under unusual circumstances. If it seems necessary to take a side, agree with a certain author or authority, but do not attempt to convince students that your view is correct.
7. No general class conclusion need come from class discussion of the issue.