

## TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS

American democracy required that citizens be able to listen to all sides of a controversial issue, sort out the facts, and arrive at independent conclusions. Thus, students in school have a right to be exposed to issues, which are within their intellectual grasp and are under current debate in our society. They should have the opportunity to study these issues in a class atmosphere where the large part of the curriculum is made up of established truths and values and the elements of our American heritage and traditions.

A controversial issue is any topic or problem on which there are differences of opinion. A controversial issue arises when different interpretations are given to a particular set of circumstances. Although there may be disagreement over facts, an issue usually becomes controversial because of values, which are applied to the facts. Such issues will vary according to region, community, prevailing political, economic, and sociological climate and time.

The community has a right to expect that controversial issues will be presented in a fair and unbiased manner and to communicate through proper channels to the Board if convinced that they are not. The Board will attempt, through its policies, to employ capable teachers, supply them with the necessary teaching materials, and maintain an atmosphere of academic freedom in the schools.

It is the teacher's responsibility to select issues for study and discussion which contribute to the attainment of course objectives, and to make available to students materials concerning the various aspects of the issues. This includes access to all relevant information freely available in the school or public library.

Students should have the opportunity to find, collect, and assemble factual material on the subject, interpret the data without prejudice, reconsider assumptions and claims, and reach their own conclusions. Students have the right to form and express their own points of view and opinions without jeopardizing their positions in the classroom or in the school.

Teachers should have the right to express an opinion, providing the pupils understand it is the teacher's opinion and does not have to be accepted by the pupils as an authoritative answer. To encourage students to search after truth and think for themselves, teachers should refrain from expressing personal views before and during the period of research and study. Criticism and the promotion of a cause within the classroom are inappropriate and unscholarly. The teacher's attitude should be one which is truth seeking, open-minded, and tolerant.

### CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING APPROPRIATENESS OF ISSUES FOR CLASSROOM TREATMENT:

1. The topic should be significant or related to a persistent problem, so that the information acquired about it will be of continuing usefulness. Significant issues are those which, in general, concern considerable numbers of people and/or are under consideration by the public.

2. The topic should be considered within the emotional, intellectual, and social capacities of the class.
3. There should be adequate and appropriate materials available which present all sides of the issue.
4. The issue should be of importance and interest to students.
5. The topic should be one which the teacher can handle from both a personal and academic point of view.
6. The topic should be one which is in harmony with the nature of the course of study and one which is in keeping with the general aims of the District.

Teachers as individuals through their councils, committees, departments, and faculties, will be responsible for determining when and how to deal with controversial issues according to the maturity and needs of students and within the policies of the School Board.

Teachers shall consult with the administration on the appropriateness of any planned discussion of controversial issues with children. If in the judgment of the building Principal, the material is deemed to be inappropriate to that age level student, the teacher will be so informed, and that material will be removed for further study and discussion.

**REFERENCE  
11/30/92**

**POLICY ADOPTED: 26 Feb 06  
POLICY AMENDED: 21 Aug 09**