TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The School Board accepts training for effective citizenship as one of the major purposes of education and recognizes that the preparation for effective citizenship includes the study of issues on which differing positions may be held by individuals or groups.

In considering such issues, it shall be the purpose of the Alexandria City Public Schools to allow study of teacher-assigned issues. The student shall:

(1) Have free access to all relevant information and materials in the school;
(2) Conduct research in an atmosphere of freedom from bias and prejudice;
(3) Form and express opinions on assigned issues.

The role of the teacher in the presentation of assigned issues is vitally important. All sides of the issue should be given the students in a dispassionate manner. The goal is for students to be taught to think clearly on all matters of importance, and to make decisions in the light of all the materials that have been presented or can be researched on the issues. Indoctrination is not the intent or purpose of the school division.

It is essential that when discussing controversial issues and expressing opinions, students be encouraged to provide evidence to support their perspectives, claims, and assertions. They should also be encouraged to consider multiple points of view related to a controversial issue, problem, or decision—including why a specific issue may raise multiple opinions and perspectives. Such critical thinking skills as comparing and evaluating sources, including analysis and evaluation of potential evidence of bias or propaganda, are essential for dealing with controversial issues within a class context.

When appropriate, or when asked, the teacher may give his/her opinion but must be sure that the student recognizes the given opinion as the teacher's personal opinion.

Although the instructional program of the school division includes many facets of the political party system in the United States, the School Board does not approve as a part of the school program the involvement of students in activities that imply school endorsement of an individual political party or candidate.

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