

**Controversial Issues**

A question shall be considered controversial when one or more of the proposed answers are objectionable enough to a section of the citizenry to arouse strong reaction.

The consideration of controversial questions shall have a legitimate place in the work of the public schools. Sooner or later young people must meet and face such questions. It is important that they have experience with such questions under circumstances that promote consideration of all pertinent factors. The handling of a controversial question in school shall be free from the assumption that there is one correct answer which shall emerge from the discussion and be taught authoritatively to the student. Indoctrination shall not be the purpose; rather, the purpose shall be to have the student see as fully as possible all sides of the question.

The decision about whether a controversial question shall become a matter for school study shall be based on such considerations as the timeliness of the question, the maturity of the students, the needs of the students, and the purpose of the school. No individual or group may claim the right to present arguments directly to students in school. Such a "right" will make the schools battlegrounds for many controversial questions. Citizens have the right to know that controversial issues are being presented fairly and to protest to the Board if convinced that they are not.

Subject areas or content material shall be taught in accordance with the requirements of the state statutes.

To implement Board policy dealing with this topic, the following administrative and teaching regulations are to be observed:

For principals:

1. Assign only teachers of superior training and experience to teach subjects where the discussion of controversial topics occurs most often;
2. Remind teachers that we do not teach controversial issues but rather provide opportunities for their study.

For teachers:

1. Deal with controversial topics as impartially and objectively as possible. Do not intrude and/or impose on your own biases.
2. Handle all topics in a manner suited to the range of knowledge, maturity, and competence of your students.
3. Have teaching materials dealing with all possible aspects of the topics readily available.
4. Don't manufacture an issue. Take up only those that are current and real. When you do, you will be able to find up-to-date teaching materials in the current press and periodical literature. Generally your best single sources of reliable information will come from those places plus court decisions and legal opinions.
5. Do not expect or require that the class reach an agreement.
6. Whenever you are in doubt about the advisability of taking up a given "hot" topic, consult your principal.
7. Remember that Board policy is designed to protect you as well as your pupils from unfair or inconsiderate criticism whenever your pupils are studying a controversial subject.

Legal Reference: SDCL 13-33-9

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