

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND THE USE OF CONTROVERSIAL MATERIALS

1.0 Definitions.

- 1.1 Controversial issues are defined as those problems, subjects or questions about which there are significant differences in viewpoint and discussion and which generally create strong feelings among people. Although there may be disagreement over what the facts are and what they mean, subjects usually become controversial issues because of differences in interpretation or the values people use in applying the facts.
- 1.2 Controversial materials are defined as learning resources that are subject to disagreement as to appropriateness because they refer or relate to a controversial issue or present material in a manner which is itself controversial.

2.0 **General.** Instruction that involves controversial issues and/or the use of controversial materials shall be aligned to state academic standards and outcomes and shall be appropriate to the grade level, maturity and intellectual capacity of the students. The educational purpose of teaching about controversial issues or using controversial materials must be student achievement in state academic standards and outcomes rather than reaching conclusions about the validity of a specific point of view.

3.0 Staff Expectations.

- 3.1 Staff members shall refrain from demonstrating practices, or directing students to demonstrate practices, which have significant religious or spiritual components.
- 3.2 Sensitivity to practices and beliefs of other cultures shall be manifested in instructional methods and academic content.
- 3.3 This policy shall not be construed to prevent staff members from teaching about the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contributions to our world heritage consistent with state academic standards and outcomes.
- 3.4 An educational climate shall be established which is conducive to rational thought, free inquiry, and reflect respect for the dignity of the individual.
- 3.5 Students shall be taught how to study issues and shall be provided the opportunity to identify, express, and defend their viewpoints without penalty or fear of reprisal or ridicule.
- 3.6 staff members shall provide instructional materials that set forth a fair representation of opposing sides of controversial issues so that students may develop, under guidance, the practice of critical thinking.
- 3.7 Staff members shall inform the Principal or Principal's designee of controversial issues that arise unexpectedly which cause or are likely to cause concern among students and/or parents/guardians.

4.0 Notice to Parents/Guardians and Requests for Exemptions.

- 4.1 The Principal or Principal's designee shall notify parents/guardians in a timely manner regarding content, materials, learning activities, and/or instructional strategies that staff members anticipate could reasonably be expected to align with the definition of controversial issues or materials as defined in section 1.0. Such notice shall provide opportunities for parents/guardians to request and receive information as is reasonably necessary to comprehend the content, materials, learning activities, and/or instructional strategies and encourage parents/guardians to contact the Principal or Principal's designee should the parents/guardians have questions.
- 4.2 Parents/guardians may submit to the Principal or Principal's designee a request that their student be exempted from instruction involving controversial issues or materials, as defined by this policy. the request shall specify:
 - 4.2.1 The portion(s) of the instruction from which they are requesting their student be exempted; and
 - 4.2.2 The reasons for their request.
- 4.3 Upon receiving the request, the Principal or Principal's designee shall first confer with relevant staff members and the parent/guardian to determine whether the concern prompting the request may be accommodated without exempting the student from the instruction or learning material.
- 4.4 If the Principal or Principal's designee determines that such an accommodation is not possible, the Principal or Principal's designee shall determine whether it is feasible to offer an alternative learning activity to the student that will not fundamentally alter course requirements or state academic standards.
 - 4.4.1 If the Principal or Principal's designee determines an alternative learning activity is feasible, such alternative shall be provided in a non-stigmatizing manner to the student.
 - 4.4.2 If the Principal or Principal's designee determines an alternative learning activity is not feasible, the student and parent/guardian shall be informed that the requested exemption from instruction may impact the student's learning or achievement.
 - 4.4.3 Exemptions from instruction do not excuse a student from the district's high school graduation requirements.
- 4.5 If the parent/guardian disagrees with the decision of the Principal or Principal's designee, the parent/guardian may appeal the decision to the responsible Executive Director of Schools. The Executive Director of Schools' decision may be appealed to the executive director of curriculum and instruction, whose decision shall be final.

- 5.0 Principals are responsible for seeking guidance from the District's General Counsel whenever the presentation of a controversial issue or material has been challenged on legal grounds or threatens the orderly operation of the school.
- 6.0 **Comprehensive Health/Human Sexuality Curriculum.** Staff members shall notify parents/guardians in writing prior to student participation in a District-approved comprehensive health education course. Such notice shall be approved by the District's Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction and shall inform parents/guardians of the upcoming instructional activities and the parents'/guardians' right to exempt their student from all or part of such instruction, and allow parents/guardians to specify the components of the instruction from which the student is to be excused.
- 6.1 To assist parents/guardians in determining whether to request an exemption, each school shall give parents/guardians so requesting an opportunity to review the materials to be used and participate in a conference with the staff member and Principal or Principal's designee.
- 6.2 Building administrators shall maintain all requests for exemption in students' files.
- 6.3 Students for whom parents/guardians have submitted a signed exemption request shall be provided with appropriate alternative learning activitie(s).