

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The school provides opportunities for the study of controversial issues.

Issues may be considered controversial which arouse strong reactions, based either on personal conviction or allegiance to a group. The presentation and discussion of controversial issues in the classroom must be on an informative basis. Teachers must guard against giving their personal opinions on sectarian or political questions or any other controversial issues. Teachers should encourage students to:

- A. Find, collect, and assemble factual materials on the subject;
- B. Interpret the data without prejudice;
- C. Reconsider assumptions and claims;
- D. Reach their own conclusions.

By refraining from expressing personal views, the teacher encourages the pupils to search after truth and to think for themselves. The development of an ability to meet issues without prejudice and to withhold judgments while facts are being collected, assembled, and weighed and relationships seen before drawing inferences or conclusions is among the most valuable outcomes of a free educational system. Classroom discussions on controversial questions which arise unexpectedly shall be the responsibility of the teacher, who shall provide relevant information on both sides of the question. Such discussions shall be kept free from the assumption that there is one correct answer that should emerge from a discussion and be taught authoritatively to the pupils.

Pupils shall be taught to recognize each other's right to form an opinion on controversial issues, and shall be assured of their own right to do so without jeopardizing their relationship with the teacher or the school. Any discussion of controversial issues in the classroom shall be conducted in an unprejudiced and dispassionate manner designed to foster a spirit of inquiry. Such discussion shall not:

- A. Disrupt the educational process;
- B. Fail to match the maturity level of the pupils;
- C. Be unrelated to the goals of the board and the appropriate curriculum guide;
- D. Present any one opinion as definitive.

Teachers shall avoid supplementing the course guide with material that may be of a controversial nature, i.e., subject to interpretation as obscene, profane, doctrinaire or inappropriate, each in relation to the maturity level of the class. If material of a controversial nature cannot reasonably be avoided, the teacher shall

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review the material with the school principal for approval prior introduction to the classroom, with subsequent review and disposition by the chief school administrator in the event that a determination cannot be made by the school principal. In doubtful cases, the chief school administrator may present the matter for board consideration. The building principal shall have the authority to limit or suspend discussion of controversial issues pending a review of the issue/materials. Instructional materials not previously approved must be reviewed by the principal before being introduced into the classroom.

In determining speakers to be invited for a class or school-wide program, the teacher must consider whether:

- A. The speaker is controversial for any reason;
- B. The topic is controversial, or sensitive, or known to arouse strong community feelings;
- C. The proposed speaker would gain an advantage by having a "captive" audience.

When public employees make statements pursuant to their official duties: in the classroom, at board meetings, and at other meetings related to educational issues affecting the district, the employees are not speaking as citizens for First Amendment purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications from employer discipline (Garcetti v. Ceballos).

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Legal References: Use legal reference sheet.

Cross References: List your appropriate policies. See legal reference sheet for possibilities.

Key Words

Controversial Issues, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, Censorship