

## **RSU #63**

- a. NEPN/NSBA Code:** **IMB-R**
- b. Title:** **Teaching About Controversial/Sensitive Issues**
- c. Author:**
- d. Replaces Policy:**
- e. Date Approved:** **01/30/2023 RSU #63**
- f. Previously Approved:** **11/29/2021**
- g. Policy Expiration:** **Review as Needed**
- h. Responsible for Review:** **Policy Committee**
- i. Date Reviewed:** **11/07/2022 Policy Committee**
- j. References:** **Policies IMC – Controversial Speakers-Programs; Policy IMD – School Ceremonies and Observances; Policy IMDC – Religious Observances and Displays; Policy IA – Instructional Goals and Objectives; Policy IGA – Curriculum Development and Adoption**
- k. Narrative:**

Teaching about controversial/sensitive issues is impossible, or at least severely hampered, if the community does not respect the principles of freedom.

- I.** Sensitive or controversial issues will be handled as they arise in the classroom. If a teacher is unsure about ways to address a sensitive or controversial topic, they should consult the Principal.
- II.** Parents will be notified prior to the introduction of a sensitive issue in class in order to have the opportunity to choose not to have their student participate.
- III.** It is the responsibility of the schools to make provision for the study of controversial issues. Every effort should be made to see that materials and references presenting all sides of a sensitive or controversial issue are presented to students.
  - A.** The policy on controversial issues should be defined in terms of the rights of students rather than in terms of the rights of teachers.
  - B.** The study should be appropriate to the level of maturity of the students and their ability to reason and to comprehend the various perspectives of the subject matter being presented.
  - C.** The study should be objective and scholarly with a minimum emphasis on opinion and a maximum emphasis on facts. The teacher will not suppress a student's view of the issue as long as the expression of that view is not derogatory, malicious, or abusive toward other students' views. Additionally, one student will not be permitted to dominate the discussion. In handling sensitive or controversial subjects in the classroom, teachers and students will be encouraged to keep an

open mind and will be encouraged to come to their own conclusions regarding a particular problem after independent inquiry.

- IV.** In the study of controversial issues, the students have the following rights:
  - A.** The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance;
  - B.** The right to have free access to all relevant information;
  - C.** The right to form and express opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing relations with the teacher or the school; and
  - D.** The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- V.** The teacher employs the same methods in handling controversial issues as characterize the best teaching at any time.
  - A.** The teacher, in selecting both the content and the method of instruction, is mindful of the maturity level of the students and alignment with approved curriculum.
  - B.** The teacher made assurances that the controversial subject to be discussed belongs within the framework of the curriculum to be covered, that the subject is significant as well as meaningful for the students, and that through the discussion, students will have the opportunity to grow.
  - C.** The teacher handles the classroom presentation in ways that will ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students' consideration and strives to present a balance among many points of view.
  - D.** The teacher does not use the classroom as a personal forum, rather, the teacher serves as a facilitator to ensure points of view are presented in a civil manner.
  - E.** The teacher emphasizes keeping an open mind, basing one's judgment on known facts, looking closely at facts to evaluate them in terms of the subject under discussion, and being ready to change one's opinion should new facts come into light.
  - F.** The emphasis of student learning always is on the method of forming an opinion rather than on the opinion formed.
- VI.** Any resident of the appropriate district wishing to lodge a complaint about the use of sensitive or controversial subject matter or methods of teaching controversial subjects should direct such concerns to the Principal of the school involved. Complaints from anyone other than a district resident will be limited to the Principal and the complainant.

The procedures outlined below should be followed in responding to such a complaint:

- A.** The Principal will inform the teacher(s) involved of the nature of the complaint, and meet with the complainant to discuss the issue and to explain the review procedure.
  - B.** If the issue is not resolved with the initial discussion, the complainant will be requested to state the objection in writing, citing specific teaching methods and/or subject matter to which they object. The written objection will be submitted to the building Principal for their review.
  - C.** The building Principal will meet with the teacher(s) involved to review the teaching approach and/or subject matter as to purpose, appropriateness, and content. The findings and recommendations of the Principal will be submitted, in writing, to the Superintendent or their designee. Additionally, the Principal will inform the complainant and the teacher(s) involved.
- VII.** If the complainant and teacher(s) involved are satisfied with the decision of the building Principal, the process is complete. If the complainant or teacher(s) involved are not satisfied with the decision, the process continues.
  - A.** After receiving a formal written indication of dissatisfaction from the complainant or teacher(s) involved, the Principal will direct the appeal to the District Review Committee.
  - B.** The Committee will consist of:
    - 1.** One classroom teacher from the appropriate grade level.
    - 2.** One building administrator from the appropriate level other than the Building Principal.
    - 3.** One member from the RSU #63 Board of Directors (the Board).
    - 4.** One representative selected by the complainant.
    - 5.** One representative selected by the teacher(s).
    - 6.** A Chairperson will be selected from the Committee members listed above.
- VIII.** The District Review Committee will review the issues within 30 school days. The Committee will meet with both the complainant and the teacher(s) involved to review the teaching methods and/or subject matter for purpose, appropriateness, and content. The Committee should utilize the findings of the Building Principal, but is not bound by them and may conduct its own independent inquiry.
- IX.** Upon completion of the review, the Chairperson will present the written findings and

recommendations to the Superintendent for action by the Board. This information will also be provided to both the complainant and teacher(s) involved. The complainant and teacher(s) involved will be notified by the Superintendent or their designee as to the specific date and time that the Board will consider the findings and recommendations of the District Review Committee. The Superintendent will inform, in writing, the complainant and teacher(s) involved of the final decision of the Board.

- X.** Either party is afforded continued due process by direct appeal of the Board decision to the Commissioner of Education.