TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Controversial issues arise from conflicts in the interests, beliefs, or affiliations of large groups of our citizens. They are issues on which conflicting views are held by political parties, by management and labor, by urban and rural, and by other large groups of our people who disagree concerning proposed solutions to important problems.

Most of the District curriculum is composed of established truths and accepted values, but it also includes controversial issues. The public schools include the study of some important unsolved problems which involve controversial issues. These are appropriate studies insofar as the maturity of students and the means available permit. Only through the study of such issues will youth develop the abilities needed for citizenship in our democracy.

In the study of controversial issues, a student has four rights, which must be recognized:

1. the right to study any controversial issue that has political, economic, or social significance and concern;
2. the right to have free access to all relevant information, including materials which circulate freely in the community;
3. the right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice; and
4. the right to form and express his own opinions on controversial issues with out jeopardizing relations with teachers or the school.

The study of controversial issues should be objective and scholarly with a minimum of emphasis on opinion. The teacher must approach controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner and must refrain from using classroom privileges and prestige to promote a partisan point of view.

Teachers will use the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of certain issues for consideration as part of the curriculum.

1. Treatment of the issue in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.
2. There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable extent of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue can be obtained.
3. Consideration of the issue should receive only as much time as is needed to cover the issue adequately.
4. The issue should be current, significant, real, and important to the students and the teacher. significant issues are those which are of general concern to significant numbers of people, are related to basic principles, or currently, are under consideration by the public and news media.

A teacher who is in doubt about the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with the principal concerning the appropriateness of doing so. If discussion of an issue is not approved by the building principal, the teacher may refer the issue to the Superintendent.

Should parents desire that their child be excused from participation in discussion of the consideration of such material, arrangements will be made to respect that decision.

[Adoption date: August 6, 1991]

LEGAL REF.: ORC 2907.31

CROSS REFS.; IB, Academic Freedom
KLB, Public Complaints About the Curriculum or Instructional Materials