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TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES/CONTROVERSIAL SPEAKERS

An important goal of the schools is to help prepare students for intelligent and conscientious participation as citizens in our democratic society. One step toward meeting this goal is to introduce students to reasoned and dispassionate approaches to the analysis of contemporary social and political issues. To insure that these issues can be examined in an atmosphere as free from emotion and prejudice as the times permit, the Webster School Committee establishes the following guidelines for discussion of controversial issues in the schools.

Teacher-Planned Classroom Discussions

1. Controversial issues selected by teachers for classroom discussion must relate directly to the objectives and content of courses approved by the School Committee for inclusion in the curriculum.

2. The teachers' right to introduce controversial issues in classroom presentations does not include the right of advocacy. Teachers must refrain from using their positions to express partisan points of view.

3. The approach to discussion of these issues in the classroom must be objective and scholarly with minimum emphasis on opinion and maximum emphasis on intelligent analysis.

4. Teachers must ensure that the reasoned arguments of all sides of an issue are given equal presentation and emphasis in classroom discussions.

5. Teachers may invite visitors from outside the schools to give presentations on controversial issues when the visitors offer qualifications and resources not available in the schools. All visitors are to be guided by the standards of language usage that prevail in the classrooms and by the standards of scholarly inquiry set forth above. Whenever possible, teachers who invite visitors to present one side of an issue will also invite visitors to present the other side(s).

6. In all cases teachers must obtain from the appropriate Principal permission to invite visitors for classroom presentations. Permission must be requested at least 48 hours before the scheduled time of presentation.

Student-Initiated Forums on Controversial Issues

Student groups may request permission to conduct forums on controversial issues in the schools. The Principal may grant such requests under the following conditions:

1. Preparation for presentation of a forum will not cause any student or teacher to miss class and will not cause the cancellation of any class.

2. Adequate advance planning must be conducted for each forum. A request to hold a forum must be received by the Principal at least three weeks before the scheduled date of presentation. For each request the Principal will appoint, after consultation with the requesting student group, an adult advisory group consisting of at least two parents and two faculty members.

3. The standards for approach to discussion, style of presentation, and use of visitors as defined above will apply to student-initiated forums.

Requests from Groups or Individuals outside the Schools

No permission will be granted non-school groups or individuals to make presentations on controversial issues in the schools during school hours. Requests for after-school or evening use will be processed in accordance with the Committee's policy on community use of school facilities.

No permission will be granted outsiders for distribution of literature on controversial issues to students in general or to class groups.

A Principal may grant an outside group or individual permission to post one notice of a public meeting for discussion of issues if the language of that notice conforms to the standards that prevail in the community. The Principal will determine the appropriate bulletin board for such notices.