

Section I:

**Instructional
Goals and
Objectives**

Knox County Board of Education Policy

Descriptor Term:

Controversial Issues

Descriptor Code:

I-420

Issued:

7/95

Reviewed:

11/25

Revised:

2/26

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2 Free discussion of controversial issues is the heart of the educative and democratic processes. Freedom
3 of speech and free access to information are among our most cherished traditions.
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5 The discussion of issues in the classroom shall be relevant to the subject matter being taught, related to
6 educational objectives, appropriate for the age and maturity of students, and shall not materially or
7 substantially disrupt the learning environment. Only through the study of political, economic, or social
8 issues do youth develop an understanding of a democratic society, and through carefully taught
9 conversation and argumentation skills, students develop abilities needed for citizenship in our democracy.
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11 Teachers will use the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of certain issues for
12 consideration as a part of the curriculum:
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- 14 (1) The treatment of the issue in question must be within the range of knowledge, maturity, and
15 competence of the students.
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- 17 (2) There should be study materials and other learning supports available from which a reasonable
18 amount of evidence-based information and/or data pertaining to all aspects of the issue may be
19 obtained.
20
- 21 (3) The consideration of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for satisfactory study
22 by the class; however, sufficient time should be provided to cover the issue adequately and in
23 accordance with the Tennessee Academic Standards.
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25 Teachers will establish a process for discussion of controversial issues in their classrooms, and the
26 Department of Teaching and Learning will provide training support for those teachers who need or want
27 to develop their skills for engaging students in discussions around sensitive content.
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29 In discussing controversial issues, the teacher should keep in mind that the classroom is a forum. The
30 class should feel no responsibility for reaching agreement. To ensure that controversial issues are
31 presented and discussed fairly and objectively and with instruction as their goal, the following guidelines
32 shall be observed:
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- 34 1. All personnel will seek to create an atmosphere in which differing opinions may be voiced without
35 fear or hostility and with mutual respect for all viewpoints;
36
- 37 2. Educators will encourage students to withhold judgment and to avoid making conclusions until
38 all relevant and significant facts have been assembled, critically examined, and checked for
39 accuracy and reliability;
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- 41 3. Educators will seek to develop in students a sense of responsibility for their beliefs, opinions,
42 attitudes, and actions;

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- 4. Educators shall place major emphasis upon “why” and “how” to think rather than “what” to think; and
- 5. If the subject matter being taught involves conflicting opinions, theories, or schools of thought, the teacher will ensure that differing sides of an issue are explored in order to help students develop their own critical faculties.

It is the responsibility of educators to bring out the facts where controversial questions are concerned. All personnel have the right to express personal opinions, but matters discussed in the classroom should be constrained to subjects relevant to that classroom and subjects that are within the educator’s areas of competence. All personnel shall be cautious in expressing personal views in the classroom and shall be careful not to introduce controversial matters that have no relationship to the subject being taught or any subject which the educator cannot claim authority or professional competence. If an educator does express a personal opinion after complying with this Policy, the opinion shall be qualified as personal and not authoritative.

It is recognized that citizens of the community have a right to petition/complain to the school administration when alleging that unfair and prejudiced presentations are being made by an educator. Such protests shall be registered in compliance with the procedures adopted by the Board of Education for handling complaints.

Legal Reference:

- 1. T.C.A. § 49-6-1019.

Cross Reference:

- Knox County Board of Education Policy G-200 “Academic Freedoms.”