TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Students are exposed to a wide range of issues, information, ideas and values at school, at home and in the community. Particular issues may be controversial because of differing political, religious, moral, ethical or cultural beliefs. In the context of the educational program and approved curricula, the Board supports discussion of controversial issues in an atmosphere that promotes learning and respect for the beliefs of others. For the purposes of this policy, controversial issues shall be understood to be issues of public debate where multiple interpretations exist within credible academic scholarship.

To promote appropriate and fair consideration of controversial issues in the instructional setting, the Board expects the following principles to be followed by educators.

1. Discussion of controversial issues shall be appropriate to the age, grade and maturity of the students involved, pursuant to the academic program of instruction.

2. Instruction on controversial issues shall prioritize evidence-based inquiry, disciplinary scholarship, and historical accuracy.

3. Discussion of a controversial issue may take place as part of the approved curriculum and for educational purposes. The educator must be knowledgeable about the issue and serve as a facilitator to ensure that points of view are presented in a civil manner. In the capacity as facilitator, it is the educator's responsibility to identify diverse points of view on an issue, and to make certain that differing opinions and perspectives are treated with respect.

4. Discussion of controversial issues shall not include conduct that constitutes harassment or bullying as defined in Board Policies ACAA (Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students) and JICK (Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention in Schools). No discussion shall demean, target, or create a hostile environment for any individual on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry or national origin, disability, or any other characteristic protected under those policies.

5. Students shall be given the opportunity to understand different/opposing sides of an issue and to use classroom discussion to formulate their own views. Students shall also be provided with appropriate instructional materials and opportunities to research and study the issue.

6. Educators shall not use the classroom as a forum to advance their personal views or proselytize, but are not prohibited from expressing their own views for legitimate pedagogical purposes.

7. Outside speakers on controversial issues must be approved in advance by the building administrator. When outside speakers are used, reasonable efforts should be made to expose students to speakers on more than one side of the issue. If this is not feasible,

educators are responsible for providing appropriate information regarding differing points of view on the issue.

8. Students or their parents/legal guardians who object to particular topics based on their particular, sincerely-held religious, moral or philosophical beliefs may request an accommodation in accordance with Board Policy IMBB.

Cross References: IMBB – Exemption from Required Instruction
ILD – Educational Research: Student Submission to Surveys, Analyses, or Evaluation
ACAA - Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students
JICK - Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention in Schools

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