



6240.1: TAUGHT CURRICULUM - CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Controversial issues as studied in the school program need to be handled in a professional manner. In attempting to ensure that this happens, the Office of the Superintendent has been authorized by the Board of Education to develop those rules deemed appropriate in carrying out the intent of the Board of Education policy. The guidelines within this rule are to be followed by all school personnel.

Student Rights and Responsibilities:

1. To research, study and discuss significant issues and to reach judgments and express opinions without jeopardizing his/her relationship with classmates or teachers.
2. To learn in an open classroom and school climate so that they feel free to examine any aspect of a controversial issue.
3. To study with competent instruction in an impartial atmosphere and have access to relevant material.
4. To be protected against indoctrination, whether it be political, social, economic, religious, or other.
5. To assure that when controversial issues are being discussed in the classroom, every effort is being made to present various viewpoints fairly, impartially and discreetly.

Teacher Rights and Responsibilities:

1. To be free to conduct reasonable study and discussion of controversial issues without fear of reprisal.
2. To maintain a high degree of impartiality.
3. To treat controversial issues objectively and to present alternate and/or divergent positions and opinions.
4. To determine the degree and extent of consideration given to a specific controversial issue based upon knowledge, intellectual maturity, and competence of the students in the class.
5. To ensure that an accurate, factual and balanced presentation of material is readily available for the student.

6. To be assured, if the need ever arises, that parents will be directed and encouraged by the Board and administration to take their questions and comments directly to the teacher concerned, as outlined in Policy 1310 and Rules 1310.1 and 1310.2.

7. To ensure that a student's view of an issue is not suppressed as long as the expression of that view can be made in a reasonable manner.

Teachers, who in the performance of their teaching duties, are engaged in the study or discussion of such controversial issues shall be defended by the Board and District from unjust or unfair criticism or legal actions.

The Board's position on this matter applies to the regular curriculum of the schools and to extra-curricular activities before and after school, within the school building or outside of the school, whenever school or school-sponsored or sanctioned groups are involved. The Board reserves the right to exercise significant discretion in determining the content of school curriculum within the limitations provided by law.

Assignment of Responsibility

Since topics which might be considered controversial are dealt with in the program at the building level, the principal or designee is assigned the responsibility to ensure that rules are followed and there is compliance with the policy. Assignment of staff, in all instances where possible, will match preparation and background with the discipline, subject or course to be taught. Staff will be expected to deal with those issues which fall within their preparation and training, are related to the content and its relationship to the course/subject outcomes. Staff are not to assume responsibility for instruction which is outside of their preparation and training or is unrelated to the course/subject outcomes.

Selection

Staff should apply the following criteria in determining those issues for study:

- I. The issue should be related to the course content and help achieve course objectives/learner outcomes.
- II. The issue should be suitable for students of the intellectual maturity and background represented in the class.
- III. The issue should provide students an opportunity to study those issues which have political, economic or social significance about which they will begin to have an opinion.
- IV. The issue should provide the student competent instruction within which various and/or conflicting points of view can be presented in an atmosphere protected from bias and prejudice.
- V. The issue should not be presented to promote the indoctrination of beliefs, whether they be political, social, economic or religious.
- VI. The issue is supported by an ample supply of study materials which present sides of the topic or issue under consideration.
- VII. The issue should provide the students an opportunity to form, identify and express their own opinions and ensure that there are opportunities for a balanced presentation on the topic/issue under consideration.
- VIII. The issue should be current, significant, real and important to the students and teacher. Significant is defined to be those topics which a) in general, impact or concern a number of people, b) are related to basic principles (i.e. equality vs. apartheid), or c) at the moment are under consideration by the media.

Procedure

A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussion of certain topics shall confer with the building principal or designee as to its appropriateness. Information presented to the principal or designee to assist in the decision-making process shall include the following:

- I. The proposed topic/issue under consideration.

II. Instructional plan for dealing with the topic/issue.

III. Consideration of the “pro’s and con’s”.

IV. The benefits or outcomes to be achieved through the study of the topic/issue.

The principal or designee approves, amends, or rejects the staff member’s request based on the selection criteria. If approved, the principal or designee is encouraged to observe the activity and evaluate its educational value. In all instances, the teacher is expected to evaluate the activity and report such information to the principal or designee. In instances where the principal or designee and the teacher are unable to agree as to appropriateness, the issue should be referred to the appropriate Central Office staff member.

Speakers/Programs

Books, films and other media are valuable for giving students exposure to many differing ideas; but for expanded learning, it may also be useful to invite appropriate persons within the guidelines hereafter set forth and who are not on the district educational staff to speak to, or meet with, groups of students as part of the educational process. Representatives of varying points of view may present issues directly to students only through invitation by the staff member involved and with prior approval of the principal or designee.

With respect to speakers and programs, the following guidelines will apply:

- I. The teacher/sponsor and the building principal or designee are expected to exercise judgement and to investigate fully those proposed resource persons.

- II. Teacher/Sponsors should encourage the use of resource persons representing various approaches or points of view on a given topic in order to afford the students a more comprehensive understanding of the topic/issue.

- III. The ideas presented and the resource person invited to present them will have demonstrable relation

to the curricular or co-curricular activity in which the participating students are involved.

IV. The teacher/sponsor responsible for inviting the resource person, or any member of the school administration, has the right and duty to interrupt or suspend any proceedings if the resource person is judged to be departing from the subject to be presented, is presenting the material in poor taste or endangering the health and safety of students and staff.

Attendance at assemblies involving an outside speaker on controversial topics will be voluntary on the part of the students. These events will be well publicized in advance for the benefit of both students and parents/guardians.

The District does not by this Rule create or establish an open or public forum and reserves the sole and absolute right to determine the curriculum and speakers and programs to be invited as part of the educational process.

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