



Book	Policies
Section	4000 Instruction
Title	Teaching About Controversial Issues
Code	4810
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Teaching About Controversial Issues

The Board of Education recognizes ~~its~~~~their~~ broad responsibility for providing for a course of study in the schools that is appropriate to the ~~readiness~~~~age and ability~~ of the students in the District. The Board also recognizes that within the broad parameters of curriculum, a teacher must be free to engage the classroom ~~in~~ discussion and debate in order to stimulate the exchange of ideas and ~~deep~~~~critical~~ thinking. The goal is for students to learn to disagree respectfully and discuss and examine issues rationally, objectively and thoroughly, to enable students to draw informed conclusions, and function productively and with civility in our democratic society.

The Board also acknowledges that schools do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of communities and wider societies. Controversial issues ~~are those which may arise that~~ deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing ~~or conflicting~~ views, biases, emotions, and/or ~~opinions conflict~~. Controversial topics will always exist in our world as long as people have differing opinions. The Board permits teachers to address controversial topics in schools, which are related to the approved curriculum, to provide a safe, supportive, inclusive and structured environment where ideas and viewpoints can be discussed.~~{1}~~

Discussion of controversial topics in the classroom is at the discretion of the teacher. Issues with no factual basis for controversy are not treated as controversial for purposes of this policy.

The Board wishes to ensure that controversial issues are presented in a manner that preserves ~~s~~ the academic integrity of the District, are of significant interest to the community, have political, economic, cultural, or social significance, and encourages students to come to their own opinions while respecting the opinions of others, and promotes inclusivity and dignity for all students, while reflecting community values. ~~reflects community values.~~

~~Therefore, t~~The Board establishes the following guidelines for teachers to follow when presenting controversial issues in the classroom:

1. In the classroom, matters of a controversial nature ~~are permitted. shall be handled as they arise in the normal course of instruction and not introduced for their own sake. Such issues shall be neither sought nor avoided.~~
2. When presenting various positions on a controversial issue, in order for classroom discussion to be rigorous, ~~the~~ teacher ~~s~~ will shall take care to:
 - balance major views;
 - ~~nd to~~ assure that as many sides of the issues as possible are presented in a fair manner; and
 - ~~;not support one with no~~ position ~~being espoused by the teacher~~ as the only one acceptable.
3. Grading is based on objective criteria, without bias toward students' positions on the subject matter.
4. Discussion of controversial issues is conducted in a manner that takes into account students' age and development level.
5. Teachers will present adequate background information so that students can have informed discussions and be able to discuss the issue intelligently.

6. **When materials** Teachers will review and ensure that their use of sources of supporting information dealing with controversial topics **outside the scope of the prescribed curriculum are to be used, assigned or recommended, such materials must:**

- **balance major views and provide as many sides of the issue as possible in a fair manner, with no position presented as the only one acceptable, and students shall feel no responsibility to reach an agreement;**
- have educational value and **are be** relevant to the curriculum;
- **are be** appropriate to the **developmental age and maturity** level of the students; **and**
- **do** not adversely affect the attainment of the District's instructional goals; **or result in substantial disruption of the normal operation of the classroom.**

Prior to presenting known controversial materials to their students, all teachers shall present the materials to the building principal or his/her designee for prior approval. The principal or his/her designee will screen and review the materials pursuant to the guidelines above and inform the teacher as to whether use of the materials is permissible. The building principal's decision shall be final.

7. Before a guest speaker is permitted to address students, approval must be granted by the building principal or his/her designee, who must be informed of the scheduling of all guest speakers **within a reasonable amount of time, at least three (3) days prior to their presentation.**

The Board supports its staff in gaining the skills to be fully capable of discussing and presenting controversial topics, which includes successfully guiding students through the process, and managing contentious or heated exchanges. The district will provide for professional development and mentoring for teachers and administrative staff in this area, and encourages staff to participate in these activities.

Cross-ref:-

1420, Complaints About Curricula or Instructional Materials

Ref:

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503 (1969) (students have First Amendment rights)

Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier, 484 U.S. 260 (1988) (limitations on students First Amendment rights in an educational setting)

Board of Education v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982) (balance discretion of the Board over educational affairs with student's constitutional rights)

Appeal of Malverne Union Free School District, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 363 (1990) (teachers First Amendment rights in an educational setting)

Appeal of O'Connor, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 48 (1989) (notification prior to dissemination of controversial materials)