

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Board believes that the consideration of controversial issues has a legitimate place in the instructional program of the schools.

Properly introduced and conducted, the consideration of such issues can help students learn to identify important issues, explore fully and fairly all sides of an issue, weigh carefully the values and factors involved and develop techniques for formulating and evaluating positions.

For purposes of this policy, a controversial issue is a topic:

1. on which opposing points of view have been promulgated by responsible opinion or
2. likely to arouse both support and opposition in the community.

The Board will permit the introduction and proper educational use of a controversial issue provided that its use in the instructional program:

1. is related to the instructional goals of the course of study and level of maturity of the students;
2. does not tend to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view;
3. has political, economic, or social significance and concern;
4. is presented in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice;
5. allows students to form and express their own opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing relations with teachers or the school, as long as their opinions as expressed are not in violation of the Student Code of Conduct; and,
6. encourages an open-mindedness and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry.

The study of controversial issues should be objective and scholarly with a minimum of emphasis on opinion. The teacher must approach controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner and must refrain from using classroom privileges and prestige to promote a partisan point of view.

Teachers determine the appropriateness of certain issues for consideration using the following criteria.

1. Treatment of the issue in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity and competence of the students.
2. There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable extent of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue can be obtained.

Materials selected must be chosen in accordance with Board of Education policy on selection of instructional materials, textbooks, supplementary materials, media, and speakers.

3. Consideration of the issue should receive only as much time as is needed to cover the issue adequately.
4. The issue should be current, significant and relevant to the students and the teacher.

A teacher who is in doubt about the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom shall confer with the principal concerning the appropriateness of doing so. If discussion of an issue is not approved by the building principal, the teacher may refer the issue to the Superintendent.

Controversial issues related to the program may be initiated by the students themselves provided they are presented in the ordinary course of classroom instruction and it is not substantially disruptive to the educational setting.

Controversial issues may not be initiated by a source outside the schools unless prior approval has been given by the appropriate building administrator.

When controversial issues have not been specified in the course of study, the Board will permit the instructional use of only those issues which have been approved by the Superintendent.

The Superintendent may develop administrative guidelines for dealing with controversial issues.

If parents desire that their child be excused from participation in discussion of such material, arrangements are made to respect that request.

(Adoption date: September 20, 2001)

LEGAL REFS.: ORC 2709.31
 OAC 3301-35-01; 3301-35-02; 3301-35-03

CROSS REFS.: IB Academic Freedom
 IIA Instructional Materials
 IIAA Textbook Selection and Adoption
 IIAB Supplementary Materials Selection and Adoption
 IIAC Library Materials Selection and Adoption
 IICB Community Resource Persons
 JFC Student Code of Conduct
 KLB Public Complaints About the Curriculum or Instructional Materials