

TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES

Controversial issues are defined as those problems, subjects or questions about which there are significant differences of opinion, for which there are no easy resolutions, and discussion of which generally create strong feelings among people.

The Division supports the presentation and discussion, on an informative basis, of controversial social, political, and economic issues and concerns at the school level in an atmosphere that minimizes bias and prejudice. The study and discussion of controversial issues has an important place in enabling students to examine evidence, facts and differing viewpoints through the exercise of freedom of thought and moral choice, and through the making of responsible decisions.

Instruction that involves controversial issues and/or materials must:

- be under the direction of a teacher familiar with the goals, objectives and limitations of the Division's policies on learning resources;
- be within the range of knowledge, maturity, interest, and competence of the students involved;
- encourage students to examine all sides of the issue, listen to the viewpoints of others, and evaluate the viewpoints represented with impartiality and objectivity on an intellectual basis;
- within an environment which provides student access to relevant material resources and factual, accurate, and balanced presentations on the matter(s);
- be cognizant of the student's right to form and express personal points of view and opinions without jeopardizing their position in the classroom or the school; and
- be done with sound professional judgment.

Each teacher has the right and the obligation to teach about controversial issues. It is the teacher's responsibility to:

- select issues for study and discussion which contribute to the attainment of course objectives and the educational program mandated;
- be as objective as possible and to present fairly the several sides of an issue;

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- refrain from using their positions to express partisan points of view;
- provide balance in the selection of guest speakers or other resources to the classroom;
- withhold the expression of personal views on an issue until students have had the opportunity to assemble, analyze, and interpret information on the matter without prejudice and reach their own conclusions.

Complaints regarding the teaching of controversial issues shall be dealt with in accordance with Policy IJ.

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