

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Controversial issues may be discussed in the classroom, provided that:

1. The issue is related to the course of study and provides opportunities for critical thinking, for developing tolerance, and for understanding conflicting points of view.
2. The issue has a meaningful relationship to matters of concern to the students.
3. Available information about the issue is sufficient to allow alternative points of view to be discussed and evaluated on a factual basis.
4. All sides of the issue are given a proper hearing, using established facts as primary evidence.
5. The issue has points of view which can be understood and defined by the students.
6. The teacher does not use his/her position to forward his/her own religious, political, economic or social bias. The teacher may express a personal opinion if he/she identified it as such and does not express the opinion for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view.
7. Discussion or study of the issue is instigated by the students or by the established curriculum, but not by a source outside of the schools.
8. The discussion does not reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, sex, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, handicap or occupation.
9. The oral or written presentation does not violate state or federal law.

The Superintendent or designee shall have the authority to judge whether the above conditions are being met.

RIGHTS OF STUDENTS

For public schools, policy on controversial issues is defined in terms of the rights of students rather than in terms of the rights of teachers.

In the study of controversial issues, the following rights of students shall be recognized:

1. To study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance and concerning which (at their level) they should begin to have an opinion.
2. To have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.

3. To study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias or prejudice.
4. To form and express their own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing their relations with their teachers, fellow students, or the school.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS

Teachers are responsible to know district policies and procedures and to make full use of this knowledge and of his/her understanding of the students, the school, and the community, the teacher should:

1. Be informed on the subject under discussion before presenting an issue.
2. Follow the requirements on prohibited instruction as contained in the California Education Code.
3. Guide students in the selection of topics.
4. Choose suitable and useful instructional materials (see BP 4116.2/AR-1).
5. Stimulate students to make use of a wide variety of materials and experiences, both in and out of the classroom.
6. Interpret materials by explaining their significance and by pointing out possible missing arguments, interpretations, and points of view.
7. Provide experiences in recognizing and evaluating the consequences of alternatives.
8. Promote, in all possible ways, students interest in, and appreciation of, rational methods of considering issues and arriving at decisions.
9. Direct class discussion to cover various points of view.
10. Refrain from using classroom prestige to promote partisan or sectarian viewpoints.
11. Obtain approval of the principal before inviting representatives of major differing viewpoints to appear before the class to discuss their opinions.

SELECTION OF ISSUES

All controversial issues selected for study shall be based upon the criteria for selection which shall apply to the following situations.

SITUATIONS

1. Major issues which are described in the Board approved curriculum.
2. Issues which arise spontaneously during classroom discussion.
3. Issues which, because of their temporal nature, cannot be foreseen.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

1. The issue should contribute significantly to the objectives of the curriculum.
2. The treatment of the issue should be within the range of students' interest, experience, maturity, culture, and competence.
3. The issue should have a meaningful relationship to the matters of concern to the students at the time it is studied.
4. There should be adequate time to justify its presentation.
5. The issue should involve alternate points of view which can be understood and defined by the students.
6. The issue should be one about which information is present and available, so that the alternatives can be discussed and evaluated on a factual and reasonable basis.
7. The issue should provide opportunity for critical thinking, for the development of tolerance, and the understanding of conflicting points of view, at the same time that it contributes to the prescribed course of study and the general educational program of the school.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ADMINISTRATORS

Professional leadership in formulating and executing policy governing the study of controversial issues must come from the district administrators. It is especially important that all administrators have a full understanding of the place of significant issues in the school program in order to base all judgments on sound professional knowledge and the welfare of the students rather than on personal feelings. Periodically, the administrator should discuss the teaching of controversial issues with the staff.