

## TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES

Learning how to debate, disagree, and dissent respectfully are vital parts of an American education. Our schools should embrace, not avoid, the study of controversial issues – ones that provoke debate, disagreement, and dissent. Students and teachers must have the opportunity to address such issues in their classrooms in an atmosphere of freedom and respect.

RSU 2 is committed to the free and robust exchange of ideas in both curriculum development and classroom teaching. This policy supports staff who teach students how to think critically about controversial issues so that they can develop their own informed opinions. It also calls on students, teachers, staff, and community members to respect the principles of academic freedom and recognize that disagreements on controversial issues are a sign of a healthy democracy.

- A. When studying controversial issues the students have the following rights:
1. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance and concerning which (at the appropriate level) he/she may begin to have an opinion;
  2. The right to have free access to all relevant information;
  2. The right to form and express opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing relations with the teacher or the school; and
  3. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- B. Teachers should use the same methods in addressing controversial issues as characterize the best teaching at any time.
1. Teachers must be mindful of the maturity level and/or developmental readiness of the students when selecting both the content and the method of instruction.
  2. Teachers must be sure that the controversial subject to be discussed belongs within the framework of the curriculum, that the subject is significant as well as meaningful for the students, and that through the discussion, students will have the opportunity to grow.
  3. Teachers must handle the classroom presentation in ways that will ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students' consideration and present a balance among various points of view.
  4. Teachers must be objective and scholarly with a minimum emphasis on opinion and a maximum emphasis on facts and critical thinking.
  5. Teachers must not use the classroom as a personal forum. They must not employ the techniques of the demagogue or the propagandist for attention, control, or entertainment.

**NEPN/NSBA Code: IMB**

Teachers have the right to identify and express their own point of view in the classroom as long as they indicate clearly that it is their own and keep in mind the potential effect of their position, authority, and influence.

6. Teachers must emphasize keeping an open mind, basing one's judgment on known facts, looking closely at facts to evaluate them in terms of the subject under discussion and being ready to change one's opinion should new facts come into light.
7. Teachers should always teach students *how* to develop an informed opinion, rather than tell them what to think.

First Reading: 12/3/2020

Second Reading and Adopted: 1/7/2021