

## **TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES**

The Board recognizes that in our society, we will be exposed to a wide range of ideas and values. American academic tradition stresses the free expression and debate of ideas and values as a vital element both in the development of curriculum and in classroom teaching. The Board supports the discussion of controversial issues, including those that arise in the context of citizenship, ethics and cultural, religious and political differences, of in an atmosphere of respect and appreciation for all sides of issues.

Training in reflective and critical thinking may be incorporated in course offerings at all grade levels through the discussion of controversial issues. In engaging in discussion of controversial issues, the school and community school needs to respect the principles of freedom and democracy and recognize that dissent does not necessarily mean disloyalty. Controversial issues should be presented and discussed thoughtfully and thoroughly.

- A. In making provision for the study of controversial issues:
  - 1. The policy on controversial issues should be defined in terms of the rights of students rather than in terms of the rights of teachers.
  - 2. The study should be emphasized in the high school, when most students are mature enough to study the significant controversial issues facing our society.
  - 3. The study should be objective and scholarly with a minimum emphasis on opinion and a maximum emphasis on facts.
  
- B. In the study of 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 should begin to have an opinion;
  - 2. The right to have free access to all relevant information;
  - 3. The right to express opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing relations with the teacher or the school; and
  - 4. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.

- C. The teacher employs the same methods in handling controversial issues as characterize the best teaching at any time.
1. The teacher, in selecting both the content and the method of instruction, is mindful of the maturity level of the students.
  2. The teacher has assured him/herself that the controversial subject to be discussed belongs within the framework of the curriculum to be covered, 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. The teacher handles the classroom presentation in ways that will ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students' consideration and strives to present a balance among many points of view.
  4. The teacher does not use the classroom as a personal forum. He/she does not employ the techniques of the demagogue or the propagandist for attention, for control, or simply for color. The teacher has the right to identify and express his/her own point of view in the classroom as long as he/she indicates clearly that it is his/her own.
  5. The teacher emphasizes 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.
  6. The emphasis always is on the method of forming an opinion as much as on the opinion formed.

Cross Reference: IMBB-Exemption from Required Instruction  
KE-Public Concerns and Complaints

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