**WALWORTH POLICY: 381**

**TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

Controversial issues provide stimulation to learning by stirring intellectual excitement and are thus an integral part of the normal Walworth Jt. District #1 classroom environment. Free inquiry in a democratic society requires that controversial issues be handled as a regular aspect of instruction and learning in such a way as to not inhibit the dignity, the personality, or the intellectuality of either the teacher or the students.

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 about which there are potentially strong feelings among people. Although there may be disagreement over what the facts are and what they mean, subjects usually become controversial because of the different values people use in applying the facts as known.

Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life. It is essential, therefore, that students have the opportunity, under competent guidance and instruction, to study controversial issues appropriate to their interest, experience and ability. They must have access to relevant information and have the obligation to examine carefully all sides of an issue. Students have the right to form and express their own points of view and opinions without jeopardizing their positions in the classroom or in the schools.

It is the teacher’s responsibility to select issues for study and discussion that contribute to the attainment of course objectives and to make available to student’s materials concerning the various aspects of the issues. Teachers also have the obligations to be objective and to impartially present the several sides of an issue. Although teachers have the right to express their own viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to indoctrinate students. This would also apply to guest speakers who may be invited to speak on the issue. Controversial issues are to be presented with good judgment, keeping in mind the maturity and background of the students.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

These guidelines are to be followed when discussing or presenting issues:

1. A determination must be made to identify the objectives in presenting the information. It

shall fall into one of the following two categories:

a. Informational---There are basically no “controversial issues”.

b. Controversial---There are prevailing different points of view.

2. If an instructional activity is deemed to be “controversial”, then all “sides” or points of

view must be fairly and adequately represented. Any program so presented will be the responsibility of the sponsoring teachers. Any controversial issue, which has questionable suitability, should be referred to the District Administrator. The following questions should serve as teacher guidelines for the suitability of handling “controversial issues” within classroom teaching:

a. Is the issue suitable for students of the maturity and backgrounds

represented in the group?

 b. Is the issue one which is important and likely to be of continuing

Significance?

c. Will the discussion of the issue or the manner of discussion be injurious to

individual beliefs?

d. Is the issue one for which adequate resources, human and material, are available?

3. If the suitability of the issue is questionable, it must be referred to the District

Administrator.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS: WAIVER FOR PARTICIPATION IN APPROVED CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

The Walworth Jt. District #1 Board of Education is responsible for approving curricular and assuring that the curricular is being taught to students in grades PreK-8. The Board of Education recognizes, however, that parents/guardians may desire or request that their children be excluded from receiving instruction in specific phases of certain curricular offerings due to conditions and circumstances outside of the jurisdiction of the school district. The Board of Education also respects these situations and will evaluate requests based on the following procedures:

A. Human Growth and Development

1. Each year, the administration shall provide the parent/guardian of each pupil

enrolled in the school district with an outline of the human growth and development curriculum used in that pupil’s grade level. The parent/guardian shall also be advised of his/her right to inspect the complete curriculum and to view the instructional materials. These documents will also be made available upon request for inspection at any time, including prior to their use in the classroom.

2. If a student’s parent/guardian files a written request with the teacher or administrator, that

student will then be exempted from instruction in all or part of the human growth and development curriculum. When exempted, the student will be assigned to a supervised workstation away from the class and will be given an alternate assignment by the teachers. Students waived from this portion of the curriculum will not be issued a failing grade. Instead, the alternative assignment will be graded in lieu of the regular class assignment.

B. All Other Approved Curricular Programs

1. Parents/guardians are responsible for contacting teachers or the administrator with

questions and concerns dealing with curricular topics or assignments that they find objectionable.

2. A request for the exclusion of a child from any school-authorized course, or portions of a

course, must be made by the parent/guardian in writing and must include an explanation of the reason for said request.

3. The curriculum guide and materials associated with any course will be available for

inspection by the parent/guardian prior to making the written request for exclusion.

4. The written authorization will be evaluated by the administrator who will then refer to the

appropriate curriculum document and rule on the appropriateness of the request.

5. If approval of the request is granted, the student will be assigned a supervised

workstation away from the class and will be given an alternate assignment by the teacher.

6. In situations where student’s grades or credits may be affected by prolonged absence

from a course, as requested by parents/guardians under provisions of this policy, a conference will be held with the parent/guardian, student, teacher, and administrator in order to discuss the ramifications of the parental decision and to determine an alternative program if such a program is feasible.

7. If the parent/guardian request is denied by the District Administrator, the parent/guardian

may appeal to the Board of Education, which has ultimate decision-making responsibility in this matter.

Walworth Jt. District #1 does not discriminate on admissions to any school, class, program, or activity on the basis of sex, race, religion, national origin, creed, pregnancy, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, or physical, learning, emotional, or mental disability. All discrimination complaints shall be processed in accordance with established procedures.

**LEGAL REFERENCE:**  Sections 118.01 and 118.019 Wisconsin Statutes

Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 9.03

**CROSS REFERENCE:**  311- Selection of Instructional Materials

**POLICY ADOPTION:**  June 26, 1995

**POLICY REVISED:**  July 25, 2005, April 23, 2012