

## TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Board of Education recognizes their broad responsibility for providing for a course of study in the schools that is appropriate to the age and ability of the students in the District. The Board also recognizes that within the broad parameters of curriculum, a teacher must be free to engage the classroom discussion and debate in order to stimulate the exchange of ideas and critical thinking.

Controversial issues may arise that deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing views, biases, emotions, and/or conflict. The Board wishes to ensure that controversial issues are presented in a manner that preserves the academic integrity of the District. Therefore, the Board establishes the following guidelines for teachers to follow when presenting controversial issues in the classroom:

1. In the classroom, matters of a controversial nature shall be handled as they arise in the normal course of instruction and not introduced for their own sake. Such issues shall be neither sought nor avoided.
2. When presenting various positions on a controversial issue, the teacher shall take care to balance major views and to assure that as many sides of the issue as possible are presented in a fair manner, with no position being espoused by the teacher as the only one acceptable.
3. When materials dealing with controversial topics are to be used, assigned or recommended, such materials must:
  - have educational value and be relevant to the curriculum;
  - be appropriate to the age and maturity level of the students; and
  - not adversely affect the attainment of the District's instructional goals or result in substantial disruption of the normal operation of the classroom.

Prior to presenting controversial materials to their students all teachers shall:

1. review carefully any and all material to be distributed to students with the understanding that the teacher will be responsible and accountable for all materials distributed; and
2. notify the Principal and, if deemed appropriate by the teacher, the students in advance of the dissemination of any material likely to be considered controversial by staff, class or community.

The Principal will review the materials pursuant to the guidelines above.

Ref: *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 260 (1988)  
*Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988)  
*Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)  
*Appeal of Malverne Union Free School District*, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 363 (1990)  
*Appeal of O'Connor*, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 48 (1989)

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