

6013

Teaching Controversial Issues

The ability to discuss, listen, and dissent are essential elements of responsible citizenship. The school district encourages students to develop skills in analyzing issues, respecting the opinion of others, distinguishing between fact and opinion, considering all pertinent factors in reaching decisions, and arriving at group decisions.

Teachers may teach or lead discussions about controversial issues if they comply with the criteria contained in this policy. Controversial issues may be questions, subjects, or problems which can create a difference of opinion. They can include issues which may have political, social, environmental, or personal impacts on pupils and/or the wider community: locally, nationally or internationally. Often they have no easy answer, in part, because solutions may be based on an individual's personal values and beliefs.

1. The issues discussed must be relevant to the curriculum and be part of a planned educational program.
2. Students must have free access to appropriate materials and information for analysis and evaluation of the issues.
3. The teacher must encourage students to consider and discuss a variety of viewpoints.
4. The topic and materials used must be within the range, knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.
5. The teacher must inform parents and the building principal before discussing sensitive or controversial issues.
6. The teacher must keep detailed, documentary evidence to prove that both sides and/or all facts available were presented.
7. Teachers must refrain from advocating partisan causes, sectarian religious views, or selfish propaganda of any kind through any classroom or a school device. However, a teacher shall not be prohibited from expressing a personal opinion as long as the student is encouraged to reach his/her own decision independently.

Teachers who are unsure of their obligations under this policy must confer with their principal prior to discussing controversial issues in the classroom.

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