

Studying Controversial Issues

Since our society is based on the free exchange of ideas and diversity of political and social thought, it shall be the policy of this district to encourage unbiased, unprejudiced and scientific study of controversial issues as they arise as part of school curriculum. A controversial issue may be defined as any topic or problem which society is in the process of debating on which there is honest disagreement. Such issues arise when different interpretations are given to a particular set of circumstances.

The basic goal in studying controversial questions should be to enable the student to develop techniques for considering such questions; techniques which he/she will use habitually in later life. Learning situations shall provide opportunities for the development of clear thinking, balanced judgment, intelligent choices, informed opinion, an ability to differentiate fact from opinion and an understanding of propaganda devices. Questions treated should come within the range of the knowledge, maturity and competence of the students. Issues selected for study should be current, significant and of interest to the students.

The role of the teacher should be such as will reveal to students the processes used by the social scientist to identify, study and solve problems. The teacher shall avoid indoctrination in his/her own personal viewpoint and shall not attempt to control or limit the judgment of students. The selection of materials, guest speakers and classroom activities in general shall be done with studied impartiality for the purpose of fairly presenting all sides of an issue.

The administration of this policy in the district is the immediate responsibility of the building principal under the guidance of procedures established by the superintendent.

END OF POLICY

Legal Reference(s):
United States Constitution, Amendment I.
Nevada Constitution, Article 1.

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In determining whether to present a controversial issue in class, teachers will consider these questions:

1. Is the topic significant or related to a persistent problem so that the information acquired will be of continuing usefulness?
2. Is the topic within the emotional, intellectual and social capacities of students?
3. Is it a topic that the individual teacher can handle from both a personal and academic point of view?
4. Is the topic of importance and interest to the students?
5. Are adequate and appropriate materials and/or personnel available to present opposing sides of the issues?
6. Will this issue clash with community customs and attitudes? If so, can the issue be studied and discussed reasonably?
7. Is there adequate time to develop the topic effectively?
8. What are the existing Board policies concerning this issue?

Requirements

1. Topics will be discussed only if they are within published and approved scope and sequence and course outlines.
2. Books, films or materials required to pass courses and for which alternative assignments will not be provided must receive prior approval of building principal or designee.
3. If potentially objectionable concepts or language are present in materials, alternative selections must be made available to students who object or whose parents object to the content.
4. Parents will be informed in advance regarding controversial issues discussed in courses either through course outlines or by special issues and will be afforded the opportunity to withhold the student without penalty.
5. Reasonable requests from parents to view materials will be honored.

Appropriate Practices

1. When facts are presented by teacher or students, sources should be cited.
2. One person should not be permitted to dominate the discussion.
3. Separate fact from opinion.
4. Permit freedom of expression.
5. Give a thorough, objective introduction.
6. Withhold personal opinion except under unusual circumstances. If it seems necessary to take a side, agree with a certain author or authority, but do not attempt to convince students that your view is correct.
7. No general class conclusion need come from class discussion of the issue.