

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Free discussion of controversial issues--political, economic, social--shall be encouraged in the classroom whenever appropriate for the level of the group.

Issues may be considered controversial which arouse strong reactions, based either on personal conviction or allegiance to a group. School treatment of controversial issues shall be designed to instruct students in fair and objective study techniques. The decision on whether a particular controversial issue shall become a matter for school study shall be based on the timeliness of the question, appropriateness to the written curriculum, the maturity and needs of the students and the purposes of the schools. Classroom discussions on controversial questions which arise unexpectedly shall be the responsibility of the teacher, who shall provide relevant information on both sides of the question. Such discussions shall be kept free from the assumption that there is one correct answer that should emerge from a discussion and be taught authoritatively to the students. Indoctrination is not the purpose; rather, the purpose is to have the students see as fully as possible all sides of the question

The presentation and discussion of controversial issues in the classroom must be on an informative basis. Teachers must guard against giving their personal opinions on sectarian or political questions or any other controversial issues until the students have had the opportunity to:

- A. Find, collect, and assemble factual materials on the subject;
- B. Interpret the data without prejudice;
- C. Reconsider assumptions and claims;
- D. Reach their own conclusions.

Any discussion of controversial issues in the classroom shall not:

- A. Disrupt the educational process;
- B. Fail to match the maturity level of the students;
- C. Be unrelated to the goals of the Board and the appropriate curriculum guide;
- D. Present any one opinion as definitive.

Students must be guaranteed the right to:

- A. Study any controversial issue which has political, economic or social significance and concerning which (at his/her level) he/she should begin to have an opinion;
- B. Have free access to all relevant information, including material that circulates freely in the community;
- C. Study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice;

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- D. Form and express his/her own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his/her relations with the teacher or the school.

By refraining from expressing personal views before and during the period of research and study, the teacher encourages the students to search after truth and to think for themselves. The development of an ability to meet issues without prejudice and to withhold judgments while facts are being collected, assembled, and weighed and relationships seen before drawing inferences or conclusions is among the most valuable outcomes of a free educational system.

Students shall be taught to recognize each other's right to form an opinion on controversial issues.

The Building Principal shall have the authority to limit or suspend discussion of controversial issues pending a review of the issue/materials. Instructional materials not previously approved must be reviewed by the principal before being introduced into the classroom.

In determining speakers to be invited for a class or school-wide program, the Building Principal must consider whether:

- A. The speaker is controversial for any reason;
- B. The topic is controversial, or sensitive, or known to arouse strong community feelings;
- C. The proposed speaker would gain an advantage by having a "captive" audience

The district requires prior written consent of the pupil's parent/guardian before administering any survey, assessment, analysis or evaluation that would reveal student information about state identified topics.

Legal References: N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties
N.J.S.A. 18A:36-34 Written approval required prior to acquisition of certain survey information from students
N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of Board (county vocational schools)

Student Protection Rights Amendment - 20 U.S.C. 1232h

Tenure Hearing of William Lee Johnson, Clearview Regional School District, 79 S.L.D. 267; 79 S.L.D. 273 aff'd with deletion of paragraph

Cross References: *1312 Community complaints and inquiries
 5145 Rights
 *6115 Ceremonies and observances
 *6141.2 Recognition of religious beliefs and customs
 *6145.3 Publications
 *6161.1 Guidelines for evaluation and selection of instructional materials
 *6161.2 Complaints regarding instructional materials

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.

Key Words

Controversial Issues, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, Censorship

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