

## TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Board of Education recognizes that inquiry, evaluation and critical analysis are important skills for students to exercise in reaching the five district student standards: critical thinker, effective communicator, healthy citizen, lifelong learner, and responsible citizen.

As a natural part of preparation for assuming an adult role in society, matters of a controversial nature shall arise and should be dealt with as part of the student's learning experience. These matters are opportunities for students to achieve the district student standards.

In recognizing that controversial issues deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing views, biases, emotions and/or conflict, it is essential that the classroom teacher have guidelines in order to prepare and execute lessons that shall be as objective as possible while considering the nature of the subject matter. It is important that students and staff recognize the following responsibilities:

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. Questions from students should be encouraged as opportunities for critical analysis and inquiry.
2. While it is not always possible to anticipate issues that may be construed as controversial, religious or political teaching materials should generally be treated as potentially controversial, if they are not directly related to the NYS or included in Board approved curriculum as a primary or supplemental resource.
3. 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 issues as possible are presented in a fair manner, with no position being espoused by the teacher as the only one acceptable.
4. When materials dealing with controversial topics are to be used, assigned or recommended, such materials shall be appropriate to the maturity level of the students and within the curriculum area under study. The School Librarian may be an appropriate resource. In such cases, the materials should be reviewed by the Building Administrator prior to use in the classroom.
5. Prior to any planned introduction of a potentially controversial topic, parents should receive notice with an opportunity to have their child opt-out of the learning experience. An alternative learning experience equivalent to the original experience will be provided for that child. The parent will be responsible for providing the equivalent learning experience.
6. Before a controversial speaker is permitted to address the students, approval must be granted by the Building Administrator.

7. Parents of students who have religious beliefs or practices that may conflict with curriculum or school practices have a responsibility to communicate those conflicting needs to school personnel so that such beliefs or practices can be mutually accommodated.

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