

Attachment B

Model Policy Regarding Controversial Issues

Purpose

To provide guidelines for school-based and non school-based administrators, teachers, and students in dealing with controversial issues in ways that develop critical thinking skills and reflect sensitivity to the emotions often engendered by such issues.

Philosophy

The preparation for effective citizenship includes the study of issues that are controversial. The study of controversial issues shall be conducted in an atmosphere in which knowledge can be freely imparted and the critical thinking of students can be developed through research and classroom discussion within the guidelines of the instructional program.

Role of the Teacher

An issue is controversial when there are substantial differences of opinion about it on the interpersonal, local, national, or international level and when these differences of opinion are accompanied by intense feelings and strong emotions on the part of individuals or groups.

Teachers should use the following guidelines in dealing with controversial issues in the instructional program:

Address controversial topics as impartially and objectively as possible. Do not allow personal biases or personal beliefs to interfere with professional judgment.

Handle controversial issues in a manner relevant to the content of the course and appropriate to the knowledge and maturity of the students.

When there is doubt about the impact of a controversial issue in planned instruction, the teacher should consult with the principal, or the principal's designee, and provide a brief outline of the instructional strategies that will be used to ensure objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and relevance to the objectives of the instructional program.

Encourage critical thinking by offering multiple perspectives on the issues under discussion, gathering information and evidence from diverse sources, considering implications and consequences of varying viewpoints, checking for assumptions, and using questions to guide ideas and clarify thinking.

Do not require that students will reach agreement. Agreement is not a necessary outcome when students engage with controversial issues. Learning to discuss controversial issues in a civil manner that promotes intellectual integrity and preserves personal dignity is expected.

Be sensitive to students with heightened feelings and emotions engendered by a controversial issue proposed for discussion.

Speakers on Controversial Issues

All invitations to guest speakers on controversial issues must be approved by the principal, or the principal's designee. The teacher, student, or student group who proposes to extend invitations must outline for the principal, or the principal's designee, the following:

- The expected contribution of the speakers to the instructional program.
- Plans for preliminary and follow-up discussions and activities designed to help students put each speaker's views into context and perspective.
- Provisions for fair treatment of the views of each speaker and of differing opinions.
- The intended audience for each speaker's remarks.

Teachers should discuss with the principal, or the principal's designee, the advisability of informing parents about invitations extended to speakers who will address controversial issues.

Students from other classes who have not been involved in preliminary activities should not attend the presentation without the approval of the principal, or the principal's designee.

When guest speakers are scheduled for presentation other than in a regular class setting, the principal, or the principal's designee, will determine the appropriateness of the proposed forum for the presentation.

Distribution and Display of Literature about Controversial Issues

The principal, or the principal's designee, shall determine the appropriate time, place, and manner for the distribution and/or display of materials about controversial issues.

Materials advocating specific violent tactics and/or disruption of government functions are not allowed. Expression of student opinion may not be used to present material that is obscene or slanderous; defames character; or advocates violation of federal, state, or local laws or school policies, rules, or regulations.