

698 Teaching about Controversial Topics

I. PURPOSE

The District has a responsibility to include, in various curriculum areas and at all grade levels, content dealing with critical topics and using materials, some of which will be controversial or raise objections within the community. The school board has the final authority to give or withhold consent for any school activity or program.

II. DEFINITION

Controversial topics are defined as problems, subjects or questions about which there are major differences of opinion, for which there are no easy answers, and discussion of which generally create strong feelings among people.

III. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Policy of the Waconia Public School District is as follows:

- A. Development of rational thinking and preparation for citizenship are the primary reasons for including the study of controversial topics or use of controversial materials in the curriculum.
- B. The District, as an educational institution and as individual classroom teachers have a responsibility to give the student:
 - 1. An opportunity to study controversial topics or read controversial materials which have political, economic or social significance about which they will begin to have an opinion.
 - 2. Access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
 - 3. Competent instruction balancing the various points-of-view in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
 - 4. The right to form and express their own opinions on controversial topics or materials without jeopardizing their relations with teachers or the schools.
 - 5. Deliberate effort shall be made by the teacher to achieve balance over time in the viewpoints to which students are exposed. The teacher shall not espouse a biased viewpoint that is intended to influence students' creation of their own viewpoints.
 - 6. Any outside speaker on controversial topics shall be approved by the Principal prior to utilization of the speaker. The use of any speaker on a controversial topic shall be balanced by another speaker who espouses an opposing view.
 - 7. If a controversial issue that is neither directly related to the course content nor specified as a part of the curriculum unexpectedly arises during a class discussion, for example as the result of a student's questions or comments or in the coverage of current events, the teacher may dedicate sufficient time to the issue to assure balanced, impartial coverage.

IV. GUIDELINES

Guidelines for the selection of controversial topics or materials to be studied in the classroom:

- A. The topic or material should contribute toward helping students develop techniques for examining other controversial topics or materials.
- B. The topic or material should be suitable for students of the maturity and background represented in the respective class.
- C. The topic or material should be related to the standards and course content and help achieve those standards and course objectives.
- D. The topic or material should be of continuing significance.
- E. Exceptions to the above expectations may be granted by the building principal on a case-by-case basis.
- F. Administration shall be responsible for informing all staff members of the policy on coverage of controversial issues in the curriculum. In doing so, they shall emphasize the basic assumption that the school is providing an opportunity for students to study controversial issues, not teaching a viewpoint on controversial issues.
- G. A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues and materials in the classroom shall confer with his/her principal as to the appropriateness of doing so. If the teacher and principal are unable to agree, the issue shall be referred to the superintendent or superintendent's designee.

V. RECONSIDERATION OF A CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC

- A. The school district shall provide a process for members of the school district community to seek reconsideration of the use of a controversial topic or material as outlined in District Policy 606.
- B. The Superintendent or designee shall be responsible for the development of guidelines and procedures to identify the steps to be followed to seek reconsideration of the use of a controversial topic or material.

Cross References: District 110 Policy #604 Instructional Curriculum
 District 110 Policy #606 Textbook and Instructional Materials
 District 110 Policy #625 Media and Book Selection

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Independent School District No. 110
Waconia, MN