

## TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

As a natural part of preparation for assuming an adult role in society, matters of a controversial nature will arise and may be dealt with as part of the student's learning experience.

The Board of Education recognizes that controversial issues deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing views, biases, emotions and/or conflict. Therefore, it is essential that the classroom teacher have guidelines in order to prepare and execute lessons that will 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.
2. 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.
3. When materials dealing with controversial topics are to be used, assigned or recommended, such materials must:
  - balance major views and provide as many sides of the issue as possible in a fair manner, with no position presented as the only one acceptable;
  - be appropriate to the maturity level of the students; and
  - not adversely affect the attainment of the district's instructional goals or result in substantial disruption of the normal operation of the classroom.

Prior to presenting materials on such an issue, the classroom teacher shall present the materials to the Superintendent for prior approval. The Chairperson will review the materials pursuant to the guidelines above.

4. Before a guest speaker is permitted to address the students, approval must be granted by the Building Principal, who must be informed of the scheduling of all guest speakers at least three (3) days prior to their presentation.

Ref: *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 260 (1988) (students have First Amendment rights)  
*Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988) (limitations on students First Amendment rights in an educational setting)  
*Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982) (balance discretion of the Board over educational affairs with student's constitutional rights)  
*Appeal of Malverne Union Free School District*, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 363 (1990) (teachers First Amendment rights in an educational setting)

*Appeal of O'Connor*, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 48 (1989) (notification prior to dissemination of controversial materials)

Adoption date: August 8, 2006