

Board Policy Document

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Series 600

Policy Title: Teaching Controversial Issues

Code Number: AR681.19

Teachers should consider the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of issues as a part of the curriculum:

1. The treatment of the issue must be within the range, knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.
2. There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue can be obtained.
3. Consideration of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for satisfactory study by the class to cover the issue adequately.
4. The issue should be current, relevant, significant, real, and important to the students, teacher, and public. Significant issues are those which, in general, concern considerable numbers of people, are related to basic principles, or at the moment are under consideration by the public, press, and mass media.

In discussing controversial issues, the teacher should keep in mind that the classroom is a forum and not a committee for producing resolutions or dogmatic pronouncements. The class should, therefore, feel no responsibility for reaching an agreement.

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Legal Reference:

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It is the teacher's responsibility to bring out the facts concerning controversial questions. Teachers have the right to express their opinions, but in doing so, it is necessary that the students understand it is a personal opinion and is not to be accepted by them as an authoritative answer.

The principal bears the major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the curriculum, including the selection of materials and methods of instruction. He/she must be continuously aware of what is being taught in the school.

A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with the principal. If the principal and teacher are unable to agree, the issue should be referred to the Director of Elementary or Secondary Education.

It is recognized that any citizen of the community has a right and responsibility to notify the school concerned when it is felt that unfair and prejudiced presentations are being made by any teacher. In most cases, the citizen should first contact the teacher involved to be sure he or she understands what the class has been discussing and how it has been handled. If necessary, a meeting should be arranged with the building principal (with or without the teacher) to be sure he or she understands the class as a part of the total program. If these two conferences have not satisfactorily resolved the complaint, the citizen should put the protest in written and signed form. It should be directed to the Board for review by Central Administration, and final action by the Board when necessary.