

Controversial Issues and Academic Freedom

The District shall offer courses of study which will afford learning experiences appropriate to the level of student understanding. The instructional program shall respect the right of student to face issues, to have free access to information, to study under teachers in situations free from prejudice, and to form, hold, and express their own opinions without personal prejudice or discrimination.

The Board recognizes the need for the teacher to have the freedom to discuss and teach subjects and issues which may be controversial. Such subjects and issues may include but not necessarily be limited to (1) politics, (2) science, (3) health and sex education and (4) values and ethics.

Teachers shall guide discussions and procedures with thoroughness and objectivity to acquaint students with the need to recognize opposing viewpoints, importance of fact, value of good judgment, and the virtue of respect for conflicting opinions.

The Board encourages and supports the concept of academic freedom, recognizing it as a necessary condition to aid in maintaining an environment conducive to learning and the free exchange of ideas and information.

The Board also believes that academic freedom carries with it a responsibility that is shaped by the basic ideals, goals and institutions of the local community. These standards are expressed via the goals and objectives of the adopted curriculum, by the adopted textbooks, by school board policy, and by the school's mission statement.

In the study or discussion of controversial issues or materials, however, the Board directs the teaching staff to take into account the following criteria:

1. relative maturity of students;
2. District mission and beliefs;
3. community standards, morals and values;
4. the necessity for a balanced presentation; and
5. the necessity to seek prior administrative counsel and guidance in such matters.

As a consequence of its responsibility to guarantee academic freedom to both students and teachers, the Board expects that:

1. all classroom studies will be curriculum-related, objective, and impartial;
2. teachers will create and maintain an atmosphere of open-mindedness and tolerance, and that no one idea or viewpoint should necessarily prevail;

3. teachers will not attempt, directly or indirectly, to limit or control students' judgment concerning any issue, but will make certain that full and fair consideration is given to the subject and that facts are carefully examined as to their accuracy and interpretation;
4. teachers will exercise professional judgment in determining the appropriateness of the issue to the curriculum and to the age and grade level of the students.

To this end:

1. the teacher shall be free to choose supplemental materials to support and enhance the regular classroom curriculum except in sex education instruction as outlined in item four of this section. To encourage the free flow of information and enhance student creativity, unplanned issues may be brought up in the classroom and briefly discussed.
2. the school shall provide for parents to have their child excused from a topic which may be contrary to their religious or moral values. This shall be done in writing by the parent and include an explanation of the conflict. The student may also request to be excused if the student personally finds the topic to be contrary to their religious or moral values. The student must explain in writing as to the nature of the conflict. The teacher will provide an alternative assignment if the request is approved by the teacher and principal.
3. the teacher shall notify parents when especially controversial issues may be discussed and that they may have their child excused if family religious or moral values so dictate. The teacher should have the principal view questionable materials, etc.
4. the School Board directs that a philosophy of abstinence shall be a part of and the underlying principal in all sex education instruction. However, it is recognized that this alone may not prevent pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease and therefore the School Board allows for instruction in sex education including AIDS awareness, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, and general human sexuality. In all cases the known facts will be taught, not the opinions or moral judgment of the instructor. This does not preclude giving impartial view points on both sides of issues such as the right to an abortion or on the use of birth control methods.
5. when speakers are to be used, the principal must always give approval as outlined in the School Board Policy on "Controversial Speakers".

Cross Reference      2341    Controversial Speakers

Legal Reference:    I.C. § 33-512            Governance of schools

Policy History:

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