

Teaching About Controversial and Sensitive Issues/Controversial Speakers

American academic tradition stresses the free discussion of ideas as a vital element both in the development of curriculum and in classroom teaching. Training in reflective and responsive thinking may be incorporated in course offerings at all grade levels. All teaching on controversial or sensitive issues shall be in line with the following policy:

- A. It is the responsibility of the District to make provision for the study of controversial issues as follows:
1. The study of controversial issues should be done when students are mature enough to study such issues.
 2. The study of controversial issues should be objective and scholarly with a minimum emphasis on opinion and a maximum emphasis on facts and critical thinking.
- B. In the study of controversial issues the students have the following rights:
1. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance and concerning which (at the appropriate level) he/she should begin to have an opinion;
 2. The right to have free access to all relevant information. No sources of information, whether digital or in print, shall be blocked or otherwise withheld from students except when based on legitimate concerns about age-appropriateness, such as materials that are vulgar or obscene;
 3. The right to form and express opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing relations with the teacher or the school; and
 4. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- C. Teachers shall use the following guidelines when planning learning activities which involve controversial or sensitive issues:
1. The teacher, in selecting both the content and the method of instruction, is mindful of the maturity level of the students.
 2. The teacher has assured him/herself that the controversial subject to be discussed belongs within the framework of the curriculum to be covered, that the subject is significant as well as meaningful for the students, and that through the discussion, students will have the opportunity to grow.
 3. The teacher handles the classroom presentation in ways that will ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students's consideration and strives to present a balance among many points of view.
 4. The teacher does not use the classroom as a personal forum. The teacher has the right to identify and express his/her own point of view in the classroom as long as he/she indicates clearly that it is his/her own opinion.
 5. The teacher does not penalize students or discourage them from using sources of information, including media sources, due to the teacher's political or ideological disagreement with the source. Any instruction on assessing the reliability of sources is done in an unbiased, nonpartisan

manner.

6. The teacher emphasizes keeping an open mind, basing one's judgment on known facts, looking closely at facts to evaluate them in terms of the subject under discussion, and being ready to change one's opinion should new facts come into light.
7. The emphasis always is on the method of forming an opinion as much as on the opinion formed.

Student-Initiated Forums on Controversial Issues

Student groups may request permission to conduct forums on controversial issues in the schools. The Principal may grant such requests under the following conditions:

1. Preparation for presentation of a forum will not cause any student or teacher to miss class and will not cause the cancellation of any class.
2. Adequate advance planning must be conducted for each forum. A request to hold a forum must be received by the Principal at least two weeks before the scheduled date of presentation and must be approved by the Principal before such forum may be held.
3. The standards for approach to discussion and style of presentation specified above will apply to student-initiated forums.

Requests from Groups or Individuals Outside the Schools

No permission will be granted to non-school groups or individuals to make presentations on controversial issues in the schools during school hours. Requests for after-school or evening use will be processed in accordance with the Committee's policy on community use of school facilities.