Controversial Issues

The district is committed to teaching American heritage and tradition. While much of the school curriculum is composed of currently established truths and currently accepted values, it must be understood that in a growing culture, social change is inevitable, and that the curriculum of the public school necessarily includes the study of unsolved problems that involve controversy. Controversial issues result from differences of opinions in the interests, beliefs or affiliations of various groups of our citizenry.

The district curriculum includes opportunities for students to study controversial issues that facilitate the development of their decision-making and critical thinking skills. For example, they may study economical, political economic, religious or social issues.

Criteria for Determining Appropriateness of Controversial Issues

1. No issue involving the indoctrination of students in religious, atheistic or sectarian beliefs can or should be included in class discussions or in the curriculum.

2. Problems and issues for discussion and study should be significant and important to the course goals and objectives. The topic selected for study should contribute to the goals of the district curriculum.

3. Study materials and other learning aids which yield a reasonable amount of data on all sides of the issue should be readily available.

Responsibilities of Professional Staff

1. The teacher is responsible for treating controversial issues in an objective and scholarly manner.

2. The teacher, as a moderator and participant, should point out the possibility of alternative points of view. The teacher is responsible to see that all aspects of an issue are honestly presented and that students evaluate their sources of data as well as their own procedures and conclusions.

3. The teacher must recognize that dealing with controversial issues in the classroom requires special skills in promoting respect for the opinion of others, in developing critical thinking skills and in encouraging active participation in the democratic processes. The tradition of debating issues in a respectful manner is an important part of developing critical thinking skills.

4. The teacher has the responsibility of making certain that all students, within the limits of their ability and maturity, understand the importance of, and the reasons for, considering controversial issues.
5. The teacher must exercise good judgement when introducing controversial issues to students and guiding them through meaningful debates.

6. A teacher must first obtain the building principal’s approval before inviting prospective speakers to address a class.

7. The principal has a major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the program of instruction in the school building. The principal must be aware of what is being taught in the school.

**Student Rights and Responsibilities Regarding Controversial Issues**

1. The student has the right to study controversial issues that have political, economic or social significance in an atmosphere that is free from bias.

2. The student has the right to form and express his or her own opinion, within the framework of district policy, without jeopardizing his/her relationship with the teacher or school.

3. The principle that students’ rights must carry corresponding responsibilities should be emphasized in the process of student-teacher interaction.

**Approval date: 4/23/02**