



Instruction: Curriculum

Teaching of Controversial Issues

I. Purpose

To establish guidelines for teaching controversial issues and criteria for approving resource speakers.

II. Guidelines

A. The study of controversial issues shall begin in elementary grades and be emphasized in secondary schools when students demonstrate the maturity to formulate and express opinions about the significant issues facing citizens, community, and society.

B. The study of controversial issues shall be presented in an objective and scholarly format.

C. The student shall have the following rights and associated responsibilities in the study of controversial issues:

1. The right to study any issue, which has political, economic, or social significance.
2. The right to access all relevant information that is appropriate to the maturity level of the student.
3. The right to study in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
4. The right to form and respectfully express opinions on controversial issues.

III. Resource speakers

A. Resource speakers may be invited to speak to students about controversial issues in conjunction with the educational program and during school-sponsored activities.

B. School principals are responsible for approving staff requests to invite resource speakers to participate during classroom instruction or school-sponsored activities or events.

- C. The following criteria should be applied to determine approval of a resource speaker:
 - 1. The background of the individual(s) to appear at the school.
 - 2. Sensitivity to the relevant needs and climate of the school community.
 - 3. The educational benefit and impact of the presentation.
 - 4. The relationship of the presentation to culturally sensitive topics.
 - 5. Alignment with the intellectual and emotional maturity of the students.

IV. Responsibilities

A. Teachers

- 1. Teachers shall utilize best instructional practices when presenting controversial issues, including but not limited to:
 - a. Addressing controversial issues relevant to the content of the course and appropriate to the maturity level of the students.
 - b. Guiding instruction in ways that present a balance among many points of view to ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students' consideration.
 - c. Addressing controversial topics as impartially and objectively as possible, without interjecting personal beliefs into instruction.
 - d. Encouraging critical thinking through an emphasis on evidence and the ability to alter opinions when warranted by new information.

B. Principals

Principals, in consultation with the Division of Curriculum and Instruction and in accordance with curricular guidelines, bear the primary responsibility for the development of school procedures for the teaching of controversial issues.

C. Division of Curriculum and Instruction

The Division of Curriculum and Instruction shall provide assistance and guidance to principals and teachers concerning the teaching of controversial issues.

Legal References: COMAR 13A.04.04, *Religious Education*
COMAR 13A.04.05, *Education that is Multicultural*
COMAR 13A.04.08, *Program in Social Studies*
COMAR 13A.04.09, *Program in Science*
COMAR 13A.04.14, *Program in English Language Arts*
COMAR 13A.04.18, *Program in Comprehensive Health Education*

Related Policies: Board of Education Policy 3160, *School-Sponsored Activities*
Board of Education Policy 5600, *Students' Rights and Responsibilities*
Board of Education Policy 6000, *Curriculum and Instruction*
Board of Education Policy 6002, *Selection of Instructional Materials – Philosophy*
Board of Education Policy 6100, *Curriculum*

Rule
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