

CODE: IMB

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES

American academic tradition stresses the free contest of ideas as a vital element both in the development of curriculum and in classroom teaching.

Teaching Controversial Issues

Deep thought and the development of informed opinions should be encouraged at all grade levels. The Kittery School Department supports free and thorough consideration of controversial issues as one way to accomplish this goal.

- A. It is the responsibility of the schools to make provision for the study of controversial issues.
 - 1. The policy on controversial issues should be defined in terms of the rights of students rather than in terms of the rights of teachers.
 - 2. The study should be emphasized in the middle school and high school, when most students are mature enough to study the significant controversial issues facing our society.
 - 3. The study should be objective and scholarly with an emphasis on facts and the opportunity for discussion of student opinions at a developmentally appropriate level.

- 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 begins to have an opinion;
 - 2. The right to have free access to all relevant non-confidential information;
 - 3. The right to 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. The teacher employs best teaching practices when handling controversial issues.

1. If a controversial topic arises and a teacher is not comfortable and/or equipped to discuss, he/she will discuss with administration and make alternative plans.
2. The teacher, in selecting both the content and the method of instruction, is mindful of the maturity level of the students.
3. 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.
4. The teacher handles the classroom presentation in ways that will ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students' consideration and strives to present a balance among many points of view.
5. 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.
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.

Cross Reference: IMBA – Visiting Speakers in the Classroom and School Assemblies
IMBB-Exemption from Required Instruction
KE-Public Concerns and Complaints

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