

Academic Freedom and Controversial Issues

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom has two facets:

- A. Primarily, it is designed to expose the learner to all ideas; and
- B. Secondly, it is to assist and protect the teacher in his/her attempt to guide the learner in the search for truth.

The freedom to teach is limited by the maturity of the student. For this reason, judgments about the presentation of instructional resources are appropriate in the terms of the maturity of the student and not in terms of the suppression of knowledge.

The kindergarten level through the earlier experience in high school is seen as a continuous expanding period of growth toward maturity. The latter years of high school are regarded as the first fully mature level.

Controversial Issues

Controversial issues rising from classroom situations and subject matter may be discussed and explored in the classrooms throughout the District.

A controversial issue arises when one or more of the proposed solutions to a problem is in conflict with the cherished interests, economic or social beliefs, group affiliations, or political expectations of a section of the citizens of the community.

Controversial issues provide stimulation to learning by stirring intellectual excitement and are thus an integral part of the normal classroom environment. Free inquiry in a democratic society requires that controversial issues arising in the normal classroom situation be handled as a regular aspect of instruction and learning in such a way as to not inhibit the dignity, personality or the intellectuality of either the teacher or the student.

Controversial issues with respect to instruction in the public schools appear to present, in essence, a twofold problem:

- A. The question of academic freedom for both the teacher and the student; and
- B. The problem of technique or method employed in handling controversial issues in the classroom.

For the best interests of the individual, the community and the larger society, provisions must be made so that teachers and students alike, are free to exchange and develop ideas.

Therefore, the guidelines which follow have been devised to achieve an educational environment through which the teachers and students of the District may enter the marketplace of free ideas with hope, anticipation, and enthusiasm for the achievement of individual excellence consistent with individual ability.

- A. Controversial issues shall be handled as they arise and shall not be avoided in order to restrict or restrain the academic freedom of either the teacher or the student.
- B. When handling controversial issues, the teacher may not present his/her own personal position as the only acceptable position which may be taken on that particular issue.
- C. Controversial issues shall be studied with as much objectivity as the ability of both teacher and students will permit. When handling a controversial issue, the teacher will provide suggested resource materials or sources of information on as many aspects of

the issue he/she can in order that all students may pursue individual reading and study so that they may reach individual conclusions with respect to that particular issue.

- D. Materials and references presenting all sides of controversial issues should be made available by the school library;
- E. Neither the teacher nor the student shall avoid an issue simply because it is of controversial nature, nor shall an issue be raised merely because it is of a controversial nature;
- F. In handling controversial issues, the teacher shall not seek to bring about a single conclusion to which all students must subscribe;
- G. In handling a controversial issue, the teacher shall not suppress a student's view on that issue as long as the expression of that view is not a derogatory, malicious, or abusive toward other students' views, but on the other hand one student shall not be permitted to dominate the discussion;
- H. The handling of controversial issues does not always require an extensive examination, but all the competency of both teacher and student shall be exerted to make a clear definition of the issue;
- I. All sides of a controversial issue shall be explored;
- J. In handling controversial issues, both teachers and students shall be encouraged to keep the problem-solving attitude in mind; and
- K. Propaganda when recognized should always be distinguished from fact.

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