

## **TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

- I. The American heritage and our established traditions are not controversial. The majority of school curriculum is composed of established truths and accepted values. However, controversial issues can arise from conflicts between the cherished interests, beliefs or affiliations of large groups of citizens. Such issues often involve important proposals or policies about which citizens hold different points of view.
- II. Free discussion of controversial issues is the heart of the democratic process. Freedom of speech and free access to information are among our most cherished traditions. Through the study of such political, economic or social issues students develop abilities needed for citizenship in our democracy.
- III. Without minimizing the importance of established truths and values, it shall be the policy of the district to foster dispassionate, unprejudiced and scientific studies of controversial issues in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- IV. The teacher shall serve as an impartial moderator and shall not attempt either directly or indirectly to limit or control the judgment of students on controversial issues. It is the intent of this policy that the teacher shall foster the study of such issues rather than teach a particular viewpoint in regard to them.
- V. The above policy defines the study of controversial issues in terms of the rights of students rather than in terms of the rights of teachers. Furthermore, the student shall have the right to study any issue in accordance with their maturity, shall have the right of free access to all relevant materials including those which circulate freely in the community, shall have the right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from partisanship and shall have the right to express their own opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing the relationship with their teachers or the school.
- VI. Included within the context of this policy is that instruction which is related to religion. The importance of religion in history, culture and the arts cannot be ignored and should have a place in education. The distinction must be made, however, between these studies as part of the curriculum or as part of the celebration of religious holidays in a manner that is devotional, doctrinal or both. The distinction rests on whether the purpose of effect or the practice is a broadening of knowledge or the advancement of religion.

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