

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

SECTION: 100 Programs

TITLE: Controversial Issues

ADOPTED: April 27, 1981

REVISED: June 15, 2020

119 CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Purpose

The Board of Education (“Board”) recognizes that when properly introduced and conducted, discussion of controversial issues can help students learn to identify important issues, explore fully and fairly all sides of an issue, weigh carefully the values and factors involved, and develop skills for formulating and evaluating positions. The purpose of this policy is to permit discussion of controversial issues as an educational tool, provided that the discussion is free of coercion or bias on the part of the instructor.

Definitions

Controversial issues: Important policies, proposals, programs, or concepts on which conflicting views are held by large numbers of people in schools, community, and nation.

Authority

The Pennsylvania Department of Education Regulations provide the Board the greatest possible flexibility in curriculum planning consistent with providing quality education. [1] Consideration of controversial issues, including sensitive global, national, and local issues, has a legitimate place in providing a quality education.

To that end, the Board permits the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues, provided that their use in the instructional program:

1. Is related to the course's educational goals and the students' level of maturity;
2. Does not indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view;
3. Encourages balanced presentations and open-mindedness;
4. Is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry; and [1]
5. Does not offend on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability.

Delegation of Responsibility

The Board directs the Superintendent or their designee, through the Office of Student Support Services in collaborating with the Office of Academic Support, to develop administrative procedures that establish guidelines for the administrative and instructional treatment of controversial issues that protect the spirit of free and scholarly inquiry. The Board shall defend

staff against reprisals for acting in the spirit of the policy. Only District personnel should guide students in a discussion of controversial issues. External individuals or organizations may be permitted to speak directly to a class or assembly with the approval of the principal.

Legal References

1. [22 Pa. Code § 4.4](#)
2. The United States Constitution, First Amendment