

Administrative Procedures for Controversial Issues

(Attachment for Policy No. 119)

Purpose

The established American traditions of civil rights and respect for the individual are not controversial. Most of the curriculum is composed of established truths and accepted values but it also includes many controversial issues which are appropriately studied to the degree that student maturity and available resources permit. Through the study of such issues, students develop decision making skills necessary for citizenship in our democracy.

Guidelines

Instructional Treatment of Controversial Issues

Schools do not teach controversial issues, they provide a space in which to study, discuss, and debate about them with the support of staff. At all grade levels, the schools should provide opportunities for students, according to their maturity, to analyze current problems, gather and organize pertinent facts, discriminate between fact and opinion, detect propaganda, identify prejudice, draw sound conclusions, respect the opinions of others, and accept the principles of majority rule and the rights of minorities.

The study of controversial issues should be objective with a minimum emphasis on opinions. Staff should treat controversial issues in an impartial and unprejudiced manner and must refrain from using their position to promote a partisan point. No member of the staff shall attempt to control, by persuasion or threat, the judgment of the students.

Teachers looking for resources on covering controversial issues in the classroom should visit Teaching Tolerance's Classroom Resources page at <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources> or their "Teaching Controversy" resource at <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/civil-discourse-in-the-classroom/chapter-4-teaching-controversy>

Students' Rights Regarding Controversial Issues in the Classroom

In the study of controversial issues, the student has rights that must be recognized.

Students have the right to:

1. Study a controversial issue which has significance and regarding which the student should begin to form an opinion.
2. Have free access to relevant information.
3. Study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias or prejudice.
4. Express opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing relationships with staff or

the school.

Students who feel their rights to the above have been violated should follow the process for resolving concerns outlined in [Policy 906](#) - Addressing Student/Constituent Concerns.