

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

SECTION: PROGRAMS

TITLE: Controversial Issues

ADOPTED: April 27, 1981

REVISED: December 17, 1990

119 CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Purpose

The center of the democratic process is found in the exercise of intelligence in the solution of problems. Citizens identify and define problems, examine data, offer solutions, and make decisions. The free exchange of facts and opinions is essential for the survival of our nation.

Definitions

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

Authority

Guidelines

The American heritage of civil rights and our established traditions of 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.

The schools do not teach controversial issues; they provide for their study under competent guidance. 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.

In the study of controversial issues, the student has rights which must be recognized:

1. The right to study a controversial issue which has significance and regarding which, the student should begin to form an opinion.
2. The right to have free access to relevant information.
3. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias or prejudice.
4. The right to express opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing relationships with the teachers or the school.

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

Delegation of Responsibility

The Superintendent shall develop guidelines for the administrative and instructional treatment of controversial issues.

The Board of Education shall defend staff against reprisals for acting in the spirit of the policy.

Only qualified school district personnel should guide students in a discussion of controversial issues. No individual or organization may be permitted to speak directly to a class or assembly without the approval of the principal.

Related Information:

"School News and Views," School District of Philadelphia, October 13, 1961