

POLICY

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

File Code: 6144

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Free discussion of controversial issues--political, economic, social--shall be encouraged in the classroom whenever appropriate for the level of the group.

Issues may be considered controversial which arouse strong reactions, based either on personal conviction or allegiance to a group. School treatment of controversial issues shall be designed to instruct pupils in fair and objective study techniques. The decision on whether a particular controversial issue shall become a matter for school study shall be based on the timeliness of the question, the maturity and needs of the pupils and the purposes of the school. Classroom discussions on controversial questions which arise unexpectedly shall be the responsibility of the teacher, who shall provide relevant information on both sides of the question. Such discussions shall be kept free from the assumption that there is one correct answer that should emerge from a discussion and be taught authoritatively to the pupils.

Any discussion of controversial issues in the classroom shall be conducted in an unprejudiced and dispassionate manner designed to foster a spirit of inquiry. Such discussion shall not:

- A. Disrupt the educational process;
- B. Fail to match the maturity level of the pupils;
- C. Be unrelated to the goals of the board and the appropriate curriculum guide;
- D. Present any one opinion as definitive.

Pupils shall be taught to recognize each other's right to form an opinion on controversial issues, and shall be assured of their own right to do so without jeopardizing their relationship with the teacher or the school.

The school provides opportunities for the study of controversial issues.

The presentation and discussion of controversial issues in the classroom must be on an informative basis. Teachers must guard against giving their personal opinions on sectarian or political questions or any other controversial issues until the pupils have had the opportunity to:

- A. Find, collect, and assemble factual materials on the subject;
- B. Interpret the data without prejudice;
- C. Reconsider assumptions and claims;

D. Reach their own conclusions.

By refraining from expressing personal views before and during the period of research and study, the teacher encourages the pupils to search after truth and to think for themselves. The development of an ability to meet issues without prejudice and to withhold judgments while facts are being collected, assembled, and weighed, and relationships seen before drawing inferences or conclusions is among the most valuable outcomes of a free educational system.

When public employees make statements pursuant to their official duties: in the classroom, at board meetings, and at other meetings related to educational issues affecting the district, the employees are not speaking as citizens for [First Amendment](#) purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications from employer discipline (*Garcetti v. Ceballos*).

The chief school administrator shall have the authority to limit or suspend discussion of controversial issues pending a review of the issue/materials. Instructional materials not previously approved must be reviewed by the chief school administrator before being introduced into the classroom.

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