

## **Teaching about Controversial/Sensitive Issues and Use of Controversial Materials**

Controversial issues are defined as those problems, subjects or questions about which there are significant differences of opinion, for which there are no easy resolutions, and discussion of which generally create strong feelings among people. Although there may be disagreement over what the facts are and what they mean, subjects usually become controversial issues because of differences in interpretation or the values people use in applying the facts.

Controversial materials are defined as learning resources which are not part of the district's approved learning resources and which are subject to disagreement as to appropriateness because they refer or relate to a controversial issue or present material in a manner which is itself controversial. Examples of such materials include, but are not limited to, those that depict explicit sexual conduct, graphic violence, profanity, drug use, or other socially undesirable behaviors, or materials that are likely to divide the community along racial, ethnic or religious lines.

Films and/or videos rated R, PG-13 or PG shall be considered controversial in accordance with this policy. X rated and NC-17 rated films and videos shall not be used in district schools. PG, PG-13 and R rated films and videos shall be considered controversial at the elementary school level. PG-13 and R rated films and videos shall be considered controversial at the middle school level. R rated films and videos shall be considered controversial at the high school level.

Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life. It is essential, therefore, that the study and discussion of controversial issues have an important place in education for citizenship in a free society. Students can develop into free citizens with informed loyalty to democracy only through the process of examining evidence, facts and differing viewpoints; through the exercise of freedom of thought and moral choice, and through the making of responsible decisions. These procedures are as characteristic of and essential to a free society as authoritarian indoctrination is to totalitarianism.

Students have the right and need, under competent guidance and instruction, to study issues appropriate to their interest, experience, ability and age. Students must have access to relevant information and are obligated to examine carefully all sides of an issue. The student has the right to form and express personal points of view and opinions without jeopardizing the position in the classroom or in the school. Teachers have the right and the obligation to teach about controversial issues. It is the teacher's responsibility to select issues for study and discussion which contribute to the attainment of course objectives and the educational program established by

the Board and to make available to students materials concerning the various aspects of the issues.

Teachers may use controversial learning materials and discuss controversial issues if they contribute to the attainment of course objectives directly related to Board-adopted academic standards. The educational purpose of teaching about controversial issues or using controversial materials must be student achievement in academic standards rather than reaching conclusions about the validity of a specific point of view.

In teaching about controversial issues, teachers shall work cooperatively with the building principal. Teachers shall obtain approval from the building principal prior to the use of any controversial materials. If a teacher has a question regarding whether an issue or resource is controversial within the meaning of this policy, the teacher shall contact the principal. The principal will instruct the teacher to notify students' parents/guardians and require parents/guardians' permission prior to discussing a controversial issue or using controversial materials with a permission slip. Teachers shall inform the principal of controversial issues that arise unexpectedly which cause or are likely to cause concern for students and/or their parents/guardians.

When teaching about controversial issues, teachers will present information in an objective manner and impartially to ensure multiple perspectives are represented, and model citizenship to present fairly the various sides of an issue.

Controversial issues are to be presented with good judgment and coordination with the building principal, keeping in mind the maturity and background of the students. The influence on values, attitudes, and responsibility of the individual students must be considered in conjunction with the actual subject content.

When controversial issues or controversial materials are used as part of the instructional program, alternative learning activities shall be provided when feasible at the request of a student or the student's parents/guardians.

Revised: November 11, 2014

**Revised: February 22, 2022**

CROSS REFS.: IJ, Instructional Resources and Materials

**KEC, Public Concerns/Complaints about Instructional Resources**

**KEF\*, Public Concerns/Complaints about Teaching Methods, Activities or Presentations**

File: IMB

3 of 3

C.R.S. 22-32-110 (1)(r). Board of Education Specific Powers related to controversial content