

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES

The teaching of controversial issues and the selection and use of controversial learning resources requires the recognition of responsibilities by the teacher to students, by the principal to the school, and by the school to the community.

Process for the Approval of Teaching about Controversial Issues or for Using Controversial Materials:

The teacher must confer with the principal prior to the teaching of controversial issues or using controversial materials. At this conference the teacher must identify the controversial issue or resource, present the educational purpose for the proposed instruction, and identify the academic standards to be addressed in the instruction.

The teacher may make this initial presentation verbally. However, the principal may, in his or her discretion, require the teacher to submit a written proposal for the use of the resource.

The principal may approve the teacher's request on the basis of a teacher's verbal presentation at the initial conference. If the principal thinks that the request should be denied or is unsure of whether the request should be approved or denied, he or she shall require the teacher to submit the request in writing, addressing the issues that are discussed at the initial conference and any other issues or concerns that the principal deems appropriate.

If a written request is required, the principal shall advise the teacher of his or her decision in writing within five working days of submission of the written request. A decision denying a teacher's request shall be accompanied by a statement of reasons for the denial. Those reasons must be reasonably related to legitimate educational concerns.

Guidelines for Principals

In reviewing a specific request from a teacher for teaching about controversial issues or for use of controversial materials, the principal will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The principal will approve or disapprove the teaching of controversial issues and the use of controversial learning resources on the basis of the teaching guidelines listed in this regulation under guidelines for teachers. The principal must pay particular attention to how the request relates to student achievement of the academic standards.
2. The principal will ensure parental permission obtained on controversial issue films.

Guidelines for Teachers

Teaching about controversial issues and use of controversial learning resources are permitted in accordance with this regulation as long as the issue or resource is relevant to the academic standards and curriculum objectives of the course.

1. Controversial learning resources include those which are not included in the approved curriculum of the district, and which are subject to disagreement as to appropriateness. Examples of such materials include, but are not limited to, those that depict explicit sexual conduct, graphic violence, profanities, drug use, or other socially undesirable behaviors, or materials that are likely to divide the community along racial, ethnic, or religious lines. If a teacher has a question regarding whether a resource is controversial within the meaning of this policy, he or she shall consult with the principal.
2. R, PG-13, or PG rated films and/or videos shall be considered controversial within the meaning of this policy and regulation and shall require prior approval of the principal according to the guidelines listed below. X rated, full length R rated and NC-17 rated films and videos shall not be used in District schools.

PG rated films and videos shall be considered controversial at the elementary school level.

PG-13 rated films and videos shall be considered controversial at the middle and high school level. Excerpts from R rated films and videos shall be considered controversial at the high school level.

3. Issues and learning resources selected for discussion and study must be appropriate for instructional use and contribute to the attainment of the academic standards of the course.
4. All course content and activities must be consistent with relevant academic standards and stated course objectives.
5. The issues and learning resources should be within the level of the student's ability and maturity.
6. In teaching about controversial issues or using controversial learning resources, student achievement in the academic standards and understanding of the democratic process will be the primary goals.
7. Teaching strategies should be fairly employed so that various sides of the issues are explored.
8. Suitable materials including facts and concepts relating to various aspects of the issue should be available.
9. If the application to the principal is approved, then the teacher will plan for alternative learning activities at the request of the student's parent.

Discussion with School Principal

If, following the decision, the teacher and principal are still in disagreement concerning the denial of the proposed teaching of a controversial issue or the planned use of controversial learning resources, upon receipt of the written request of the teacher, the principal will forward the matter to the Assistant Superintendent. Copies of the request will be placed in the school file.

The Assistant Superintendent will within two working days review the teacher's written request for review to determine its completeness and specificity. If the request lacks complete and/or specific information, the form will be returned to the teacher for additional information prior to review by a committee of staff and citizens. An information copy will also be provided to the principal.

After the administrative review is completed, and the request has met the requirements for completeness and specificity, the Assistant Superintendent will schedule a meeting of the review committee for the purpose of reviewing the disagreement.

Membership of the Review Committee

The members of the review committee will be appointed by the Assistant Superintendent or designee. The Assistant Superintendent, or designee, will serve as chairperson of the review committee.

The members of the review committee may include members of the administrative staff, principal, library staff, teachers, and community members at the Assistant Superintendent's discretion. However, not less than 25% of the members will be classroom teachers employed by the district. 25% of the committee shall be parents and/or community members.

The chairperson will not be a voting member of the review committee except in instances of tie votes. The chairperson will be authorized to establish all procedures and rules to be followed by the review committee.

Role of the Review Committee

The committee will review all materials submitted by the principal and any additional materials submitted by the teacher.

Oral and/or written testimony for consideration by the committee will be limited to the teacher and principal involved, and the appropriate program manager(s).

After reviewing the challenge and considering the principal's report, pertinent testimony, available professional reviews and applicable curriculum guides, the committee will share its recommendation with the teacher and principal within five working days after the hearing.

The committee's recommendation will be based on its assessment of the issues or resources demonstrable relevance to curriculum objectives and academic standards, its predicted effectiveness in the classroom, and the provisions of Board policy and regulation. The committee's recommendation will take one of the following actions:

- A recommendation that the issue or resource should be approved for use in the course.
- A recommendation that the issue or resource should not be approved for use in the course.

Role of the Superintendent and the Executive Director of Academic Student Services

If the teacher chooses to appeal the committee's decision; the Superintendent and Executive Director of Academic Student Services or designee will review the committee's report and will submit an administrative decision to the Board. The Executive Director of Academic Student Services or designee will also inform the teacher, the principal, the committee, and the staff members involved of that decision. The Executive Director of Academic Student Services or designee, administrative decision will be rendered no later than 20 working days after the teacher's original written request for review has been delivered to the principal.

Administrative Decision

All administrative decisions concerning teaching about controversial issues or controversial learning resources reported to the Board will be kept on file in the District.

Status during Review

The teacher involved will not present the controversial issue or controversial learning resource to students during the review procedure outlined above.

Time Limits

It is the intent of this procedure to provide for a prompt resolution of the issues. Time limitations are to be adhered to except upon mutual agreement of the parties.

Adopted: February 22, 2022