

## TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

One of the most valuable outcomes of a free educational system is the development of the ability to meet issues without prejudice and to withhold judgments while facts are being collected, assembled and analyzed. Students should have the opportunity to find, collect and assemble factual material on a subject, interpret the data without prejudice, consider and reconsider assumptions and claims and reach their own conclusion.

As a natural part of preparation for assuming an adult role in society, matters of a controversial nature will arise and may be dealt with as part of the student's learning experience.

The Board of Education recognizes that controversial issues deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing views, biases, emotions and/or conflict. Therefore, it is essential that the classroom teacher have guidelines in order to prepare and execute lessons that will be as objective as possible while considering the nature of the subject matter. It is important that students and staff recognize the following responsibilities:

1. In the classroom, matters of a controversial nature shall be handled as they arise in the normal course of instruction and not introduced for their own sake. Such issues shall be neither sought nor avoided.
2. When presenting various positions on a controversial issue, the teacher shall take care to balance major views and to assure that as many sides of the issues as possible are presented in a fair manner, with no position being espoused by the teacher as the only one acceptable.
3. When materials dealing with controversial topics are to be used, assigned or recommended, such materials must:
  - balance major views and provide as many sides of the issue as possible in a fair manner, with no position presented as the only one acceptable;
  - be appropriate to the maturity level of the students; and
  - not adversely affect the attainment of the district's instructional goals or result in substantial disruption of the normal operation of the classroom.

Prior to presenting materials on such an issue, the classroom teacher shall present the materials to the Building Principal for prior approval. The Principal will review the materials pursuant to the guidelines above.

### *Controversial Speakers*

Books, films and other media are valuable for giving students exposure to many differing ideas, but it is also useful to invite appropriate persons not on the school staff to speak or to meet with groups of students as part of the educational process.

The Board, in an effort to uphold the students' freedom to learn while also recognizing obligations which the exercise of this freedom entails, establishes the following guidelines:

1. The teacher-sponsor and the Principal are expected to exercise judgment and to investigate fully those proposed resource persons to whom questions may arise.
2. Before a guest speaker is permitted to address the students, approval must be granted by the Principal, who must be informed of the scheduling of all guest speakers at least three (3) days prior to their presentation.
3. The ideas presented and the resource person invited to present them shall have a demonstrable relation to the curriculum or co-curricular activity in which the participating students are involved.
4. Teacher-sponsors should encourage the use of resource persons representing various approaches or points of view on a given topic in order to afford the students a more comprehensible understanding of it.
5. Prior to his/her appearance or participation, the resource person should agree to abide by the following Board requirements: (a) profanity, vulgarity and lewd comments are prohibited; (b) smoking is not permitted while speaking or consulting with students; (c) the teacher-sponsor or the Principal has the right and duty to interrupt or suspend any proceedings if the conduct of the speaker is judged to be endangering the health or welfare of students or staff.

Ref: Education Law §414  
*Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 US 260 (1988)  
*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 US 503 (1969)  
*Board of Ed., Malverne UFSD v. Morgan*, 3020-a panel decision; Howard C. Edelman, Esq., chairman (Feb. 2, 1990)  
*Matter of Morgan*, 29 EDR 363 (1990)  
*Malverne v. Sobol* (RJI # 01-90-ST2690) Sup. Ct., Albany County, G. Cobb, J.S.C., 4/1/91

Adoption date: June 4, 2002  
Effective: July 1, 2002