

## **Teaching About Controversial/Sensitive Issues**

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 discussions 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 because of the different values people use in applying the facts as known.

Instruction that involves controversial issues and/or materials must be within the Board-adopted content standards and curricula. Such instruction must be under the direction of a teacher who is familiar with the goals, objectives and limitations of this policy and its supporting regulation. In addition, the instruction must reflect due consideration of the maturity of the students, the values of the community, sound professional judgment, and coordination with the administration. The overriding educational purpose of teaching about controversial issues or using controversial materials must be student achievement in the content standards rather than reaching conclusions as to the correctness of any particular point of view.

The Board is responsible for the development and implementation of curriculum and the adoption of learning resources. In matters relating to controversial issues, the established content standards and curricula are basic standards for decision-making, and the Board shall have final decision-making authority.

Controversial learning resources include materials or speakers that are not part of the district's approved learning resources and relate to issues characterized by significant differences of opinion, usually arising from differing values or beliefs and which are not necessarily resolvable by reference to accepted facts. Examples of such materials include, but are not limited to, materials that may divide the school community along religious, ethnic, or racial lines. In addition, some materials may be controversial and unacceptable for classroom use because of the manner of their presentation. Examples of such materials include, but are not limited to, materials that depict nudity, sexual conduct, violence, language which is inappropriate for the age and maturity level of the student audience, drug use, or other socially undesirable behaviors. If a teacher has a question as to whether a resource is controversial or unacceptable within the meaning of this policy, he or she shall consult with the principal.

Complaints regarding the teaching of controversial issues may be presented in writing in accordance with Board policy KEC, Public Complaints About Instructional Resources.

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Revised: April 18, 1995

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CROSS REF.: IJ, Instructional Materials  
KEC, Public Complaints about Instructional Resources

CONTRACT REF.: Negotiated Agreement, Article 9, Academic Freedom

## **Teaching about Controversial/Sensitive Issues**

The teaching of controversial issues and the 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. Although age appropriate movies are covered in this regulation, so too are other forms of audio and visual presentations to students which may be age inappropriate. Such other forms of presentations would include: video, computer media, posters, works of art, pictures, records, recordings, filmstrips, film clips, plays, and television programming.

### **Basic Guidelines for Use of Controversial Learning Materials:**

1. The material must be relevant to the standards of the course.
2. The material must significantly contribute to the attainment of the educational objectives of the course.
3. The level of student ability and student maturity must be considered.
4. Community standards must be considered.

Prior to presenting or using a controversial learning resource or a resource that might be considered controversial, teachers must preview the resource in its entirety before seeking and receiving approval from the principal. If the principal determines that the material is a controversial learning resource, the principal may withhold his or her approval. Alternatively, the principal may approve use of the resource only if the teacher informs students' parents of the nature, content, and educational purpose of the resource, so that parents may exercise informed judgment in deciding whether their child will participate in classes or exercises using the resource. Students shall be allowed to participate in classes or activities using the resource unless prior written permission from the student's parent or guardian to excuse the student is received. Teachers shall provide suitable alternative activities for students whose parents have requested exclusion from the class or activity. Implementation of alternative activities shall be handled in a manner that does not draw attention to the student.

### **Films/Videos/Computer Media:**

Films, videos and computer media for recreational use are discouraged. Exceptions must be approved by the building principal.

Pre K - Grade 6:

G rated presentations may be used in schools when the material is appropriate to curriculum and instruction.

PG and PG-13 rated presentations must have prior approval from the building principal. Even if approved by the building principal, a student's parent/guardian's prior written permission to show their child the presentation must be received.

Ratings more restrictive than PG-13 shall not be used in district elementary schools.

Grade 7 and 8:

G rated and PG rated presentations may be used in schools when the material is appropriate to curriculum and instruction.

PG-13 rated presentations must have prior approval from the building principal. Even if approved by the building principal, a student's parent/guardian's prior written permission to show their child the presentation must be received.

Ratings more restrictive than PG-13 shall not be used in any district junior high school.

Grades 9-12:

PG-13 and lesser restrictive rated presentations may be used in schools when the material is appropriate to curriculum and instruction.

R rated presentations must have prior approval from the building principal. Even if approved by the building principal, a student's parent/guardian's prior written permission to show their child the presentation must be received. If an edited version of the same movie is known to be available, it must be used.

Ratings more restrictive than R rated or those presentations rated NC17 shall not be used in any district high school.

Use of PG and PG-13 films and videos for the elementary level, PG-13 films at the middle school level and R rated films at the senior high level must adhere to the following procedure:

1. Parents will be notified in writing and within a week of a student's entrance into the particular class or course of the use of the material (e.g. movies, films, videos) at the beginning of the course.

2. Parent's written permission for their child to view such material will be requested and filed before the showing of said material.
3. Students who don't have a written parental permission slip on file will not view the showing.
4. Students who don't have written parental permission will be provided an activity of equal value, approved by the principal, on the same material that does involve age appropriate materials.
5. It is the teacher's responsibility to explore the availability of an edited version of an R rated movie. Assistance through district media resources is encouraged.

### **Guest Speakers**

Guest speakers scheduled to appear at the school shall be reminded that they will be addressing a diverse, yet captive, audience. As a result, guest speakers must respect alternative viewpoints, consider the emotional and intellectual level of the students, and design their presentations appropriately.

Teachers shall communicate in advance with the guest speaker regarding his or her presentation. If the teacher determines that any aspect of the presentation might be considered a controversial learning resource as defined in this policy and regulation, the teacher shall notify the principal of any such issues. If the principal deems it appropriate, the principal, teacher and guest speaker shall confer in an attempt to resolve any disagreements as to the content of the presentation. An invitation to speak may be withdrawn if the guest speaker is unwilling to abide by the directions of the principal.

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