

## GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

**6144.**

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#### Criteria for Determining Appropriateness of Controversial Issues for the School Curriculum

1. The topics selected for study must contribute to the achievement of the major objectives of the school curriculum.
2. The topics will be considered appropriate and acceptable areas of study by a large segment of students and citizens of the community.
3. The educational curriculum will not include or promote religious indoctrination and teachers are to avoid advocating for or against a particular religion while serving the interests of Meriden Public Schools. This should not prevent or discourage the teaching of religions as an educational reality, the comparison or history of various religions, or the study of the influence of religions upon our society, our country's values, or those of other societies.
4. Controversial issues treated in curricular activities will be consistent with and appropriate to the knowledge, maturity, and competence of the particular students involved.
5. Problems and issues selected for discussion and study will be current, significant, and of interest to students.
6. The issues studied will be allotted only that amount of time required for a satisfactory study by the class.

#### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Students have a right to study and discuss controversial issues and problems in a class atmosphere devoid of partisanship and bias.
2. Students have the responsibility to learn and practice the techniques of participatory democracy in preparation for carrying out the duties of intelligent, involved citizens.
3. Students have a right to an explanation by the teacher if an issue is not to be studied.
4. Students have a responsibility to undertake the study of all sides of an issue, to listen to other viewpoints with an open mind, and to evaluate issues on an intellectual, rather than an emotional basis.

#### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TEACHER

1. The teacher has discretion to determine whether the issue raised is to be considered at the moment; whether there will be time to explore the issue sufficiently; what the relation of the problem to be considered is to the course or the curriculum; whether the students are prepared or ready to study the issue; and whether the teacher is prepared to discuss and present it effectively.
2. The students will be instructed in the importance of the reason for considering controversial issues. If an issue is not to be studied the teacher has an obligation to explain the reasons.
3. The teacher, as a moderator and a participant, will point out the possibility of errors in statements of students and writers and the possibility of alternative points of view. The teacher will see that facts, evidence, and aspects of an issue are honestly presented and that students

- are helped to evaluate their sources of data as well as their own procedure and conclusions.
4. Teachers have the right to express their opinions provided the students understand which is opinion and not an authoritative answer. Teachers will not attempt to limit or control the judgment of students, directly or indirectly, and they must avoid indoctrination.
  5. The teacher has a right to protection from pressures that demand withholding of important facts.
  6. The teacher will uphold, protect and defend the fundamental freedoms of our American democratic way of life.

#### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ADMINISTRATION

1. A teacher who is in doubt about the appropriateness of discussing certain controversial issues in the classroom or regarding his/her ability to explore such issues will confer with his/her department chairperson (at the secondary level). If doubt still continues, the matter is to be brought to the attention of the school principal before being pursued in class. If principal and teacher are unable to agree, the matter will be referred to the Assistant Superintendent.
2. No group or individual has the right, without authorization, to present arguments for or against any issue under study directly to students or to the class. The teacher, however, after obtaining approval of the department chairperson or principal, may invite representatives of different viewpoints to appear before the class to discuss their opinions.

Approved April 28, 1981

Amended December 6, 2016