

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

An important goal of the schools is to help prepare students for intelligent and conscientious participation as citizens in our democratic society. One step toward meeting this goal is to introduce students to reasoned and dispassionate approaches to the analysis of contemporary social and political issues. To ensure that these issues can be examined in an atmosphere as free from emotion and prejudice as the times permit, the School Committee establishes the following guidelines for discussion of controversial issues in the schools.

Educator-Facilitated Classroom Discussions

1. Classroom discussion generally must relate to the objectives and content of courses in the curriculum. However, additional topics that relate to timely events and issues may also be discussed in class.
2. The educators' right to facilitate discussions of controversial topics in classroom presentations does not include the right of advocacy. Educators must refrain from using their positions to express personal partisan points of view in the course of class discussions.
3. The facilitation of discussions of these issues in the classroom must be objective and scholarly with less emphasis on opinion and more emphasis on intelligent analysis.
4. Teachers are to ensure that multiple perspectives of an issue are included in classroom discussions.
5. Teachers may invite visitors from outside the schools to give presentations on controversial issues when the visitors offer qualifications and resources not available in the schools. All visitors are to be guided by the standards of language usage that prevail in the classrooms and by the standards of scholarly inquiry set forth above. Teachers must obtain principal permission to invite visitors for classroom presentations on controversial topics. Permission must be requested at least 48 hours before the scheduled time of presentation.

Student-Initiated Forums on Controversial Issues

Student groups may request permission to conduct forums on controversial issues in the schools. The Principal may grant such requests under the following conditions:

1. Preparation for presentation of a forum may not cause any student or teacher to miss class and will not cause the cancellation of any class.
2. Adequate advance planning must be conducted for each forum. A request to hold a

forum must be received by the Principal at least one week before the scheduled date of presentation. For each request the Principal will appoint, after consultation with the requesting student group, at least two faculty members to consult and be present at the forum.

3. The standards for approach to discussion, style of presentation, and use of visitors as defined above will apply to student-initiated forums. All other policies regarding appropriate conduct and language will apply.

Requests from Groups or Individuals Outside the School

No permission will be granted to non-school groups or individuals to make presentations on controversial issues in the schools during school hours. Requests for after-school or evening use will be processed in accordance with the Committee's policy on community use of school facilities.

No permission will be granted to outside groups or individuals for distribution of literature on controversial issues to students in general or to class groups.

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