

POLICY: TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Training for effective citizenship is accepted as one of the major purposes of the schools of the Millinocket School Department. The instructional program developed to achieve this purpose properly places great emphasis upon teaching about our American heritage, the rights and privileges we enjoy as citizens and the citizenship responsibilities that must be assumed in maintaining our American way of life. In training for effective citizenship, it is frequently necessary for pupils to study issues that are controversial. In considering such issues it shall be the purpose of the schools of Millinocket School Department to recognize the pupil's right:

- A. To study a controversial issue which has political, economic or social significance and concerning which (at his/her level) he/she should begin to have an opinion;
- B. To have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community;
- C. To study under competent instruction in an atmosphere of freedom from bias and prejudice;
- D. To form and express his/her own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his/her relation with his/her teacher or the school.
 - 1. The approach of the teacher to controversial topics must be impartial and objective.
 - 2. Teachers should use the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of certain issues for consideration as a part of the curriculum:
 - a. The treatment of the issue in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity and competence of the students.
 - b. There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue should be obtained.

c. The consideration of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for satisfactory study by the class but sufficient time should be provided to cover the issue adequately.

d. The issue should be current, significant, real and important to the students and teacher. Significant issues are those which in general concern considerable numbers of people, are related to basic principals or at the moment are under consideration by the public, press and mass media.

3. In discussing controversial issues, the teacher should keep in mind that the classroom is a forum and not a committee for producing resolutions or dogmatic pronouncements. The class should feel no responsibility for reaching an agreement.

4. It is the teacher's responsibility to bring out the facts concerning controversial questions. He/she has the right to express his/her opinions if he/she feels it benefits his/her students. In doing so, it is important that his/her students understand that it is his/her opinion and is not to be accepted by them as an authoritative answer.

5. The principal bears a major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the curriculum, including the selection of materials and methods of instruction. He/she must be continuously aware of what is being taught in his/her school.

6. A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with his/her principal as to the appropriateness of doing so. If the principal and the teacher are unable to agree, the issue should be referred to the Superintendent of Schools.

7. It is recognized that citizens of the community have a right to protest to the school administration when convinced that unfair and prejudiced presentations are being made by any teacher. In considering such protests, the Millinocket School Board shall provide for a hearing if in its judgment such a procedure is required.

8. If, when his or her class is considering a controversial issue, a teacher utilizes the services of an outside speaker feeling that this might be of potential benefit to students, approval for such speaker must be obtained from the Principal.

Section 8 also applies when acquiring speakers for school assemblies.

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