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Rescinds: INB

Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District Policy 699

699 TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

I. PURPOSE

The development of critical thinking and preparation for citizenship are among the educational goals of the school district. As a result, the school district has a responsibility to include content dealing with current critical issues in various curriculum areas at all grade levels. Some of these issues may be controversial. The purpose of this policy is to recognize the benefit to students of the appropriate study of controversial issues within reasonable parameters. The school board has the final authority to give or withhold consent for any school activity or program.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. The school district and the individual classroom teachers have a responsibility to give students an opportunity to study controversial issues which have political, economic, or social significance. The course of this study should include access to appropriate, relevant information, including materials that circulate freely in the community, and competent instruction balancing the various points of view in an atmosphere free from bias, prejudice, discrimination, and harassment.
- B. In fulfilling this responsibility, the teacher shall make a deliberate effort to achieve balance within a reasonable period of time in the viewpoints and information to which students are exposed.
- C. Students and parents may express opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing relations with school staff.
- D. In selecting controversial issues to be included in the instructional program, the staff shall use the following guidelines:
 - 1. The issue should contribute toward helping students develop techniques for examining other controversial issues.
 - 2. The issue should be suitable for students of the maturity and background represented in the class.
 - 3. The issue should be related to the course content and help achieve course objectives.

- E. If a controversial issue that is neither directly related to the course content nor specified as a part of the curriculum unexpectedly arises during a class discussion, for example as the result of a student's questions or comments or in the coverage of current events, the teacher may deal with student interest in the issue by devoting sufficient time to the issue to assure balanced, impartial coverage.

III. COMPLAINTS

- A. The administration shall establish procedures, subject to school board approval, for handling any complaints relative to the study of controversial issues.
- B. Recognizing the difficult position in which teachers will sometimes be placed in carrying out this policy and in giving students an opportunity to study a controversial issue, the school board places trust and confidence in its employees and will support their actions insofar as possible, from anonymous, unreasonable, or ill-considered complaints.

IV. TRAINING

- A. Principals and secondary area leaders shall be responsible for informing all staff members of the policy on coverage of controversial issues in the curriculum. In doing so, they shall emphasize the basic assumption that the school is providing an opportunity for students to study controversial issues, not teaching a viewpoint on controversial issues.
- B. A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues and materials in the classroom shall confer with ~~his/her~~ **their**-principal as to the appropriateness of doing so. If the teacher and principal are unable to agree, the issue shall be referred to the superintendent or superintendent's designee.

Legal References:

Cross References: Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District Policy 498 (Political Campaigns and Activities)
Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District Policy 606 (Instructional Resources)