# EDUCATION PROGRAMS

# Controversial Issues in the Classroom 697-NB

## I. PURPOSE

As part of a comprehensive educational program, it is necessary for students to be exposed to and examine issues that are controversial by nature. Schools are neutral grounds for rational discourse and objective study. Schools are also places where students are preparing for informed and reasoned involvement in community life by calm and cooperative study of social and political issues. Discussion of controversial issues or subjects in the classroom or educational setting is acceptable only when it clearly serves the educative purpose and is consistent with curriculum objectives.

The School Board of Independent School District 138 recognizes that teachers and instructional leaders, by virtue of their special background, training and experience , are primarily responsible for identifying the crucial issues to be presented in the classroom in consideration of the age and maturity level of the student. The School Board also recognizes the educational rights and obligations of students with respect to the following:

A. To study crucial issues requiring students to formulate an opinion or point of view;

B. To have free access to information on a variety of educationally relevant topics;

C. To study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice;

D. To form and express judgments, as appropriate within the parameters of school/district policy and/or public law, on crucial topics without jeopardizing relationships to teachers or the school;

E. To recognize that reasonable compromise is often an important facet in decision making in our society; and

F. To accept and respect the rights of others to hold differing opinions.

In consideration of these issues, the purpose of this policy is to allow for the introduction of controversial, but age appropriate, educationally-related issues or subjects into the classroom or other educational setting while respecting the right of the parent, guardian or adult student to be notified in advance of the introduction or study of a controversial issue or subject in a classroom or other educational setting and to request alternative instruction.

## II. DEFINITIONS

A. “Controversial” issues or subjects are those that cause or are reasonably likely to cause a debate or disagreement about a matter which arouses strongly contrasting opinions.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION

A. The Superintendent or designee is responsible for oversight of the introduction of controversial issues and subjects to all School District students both at the building level as well as to all School District students in general. The Superintendent shall provide advice, supervision and approval over controversial issues and subjects introduced into the classroom, as appropriate.

B. The Principal or designee is responsible for ensuring balanced and reasonable consideration of various viewpoints contained within curriculum content and any delivered instruction. The Principals, as instructional leaders, will:

1. Communicate to all teaching staff specific protocols surrounding the delivery of sound instruction regarding crucial issues within the general curriculum as well as when they occur in the normal course of every day life.

2. Maintain a continuous awareness of classroom projects relating to controversial issues and subjects and provide reasonable supervision.

3. Report concerns related to the introduction of controversial subjects or issues to the Superintendent in a timely manner, as appropriate.

C. Teachers have the unique opportunity to influence students. Teachers, therefore, have a special responsibility and duty to maintain objectivity, to avoid distortion of discussions, and to acknowledge the right of students and parents to hold a different viewpoint. The Teachers, as professional instructors, will:

1. Approach controversial topics in the classroom or other educational setting objectively and impartially.

2. Collect, screen, and provide access to all materials that will enrich and support the established curriculum, taking into consideration the varied interests, abilities and maturity levels of the students served.

3. Assure that the time allotment for the study of any issue is adequate to study the various dimensions of the issue without prolonging its consideration, thus giving it undue emphasis.

4. Have instructional materials dealing with different aspects of the topics readily available, including alternative instructional activities if requested.

5. Recognize consensus is an unlikely outcome when the discussion is controversial and is not the goal of the instruction.

6. Use professional judgment to determine if a topic to be presented in the classroom may include controversial issues.

7. Seek advice and approval from the building principal and/or Superintendent, as appropriate, if concerns for a particular issue are anticipated.

8. Notify parents in advance of the study of controversial issues as described in Section C.

D. The School Board recognizes parents, guardians or adult students may have concerns about controversial issues presented for study in the classroom. School personnel will notify parents, guardians or adult students in advance of the study of issues reasonably known or anticipated to be controversial. This notification will be sent in a timely manner when possible so that parents, guardians or adults students have an opportunity to review the content and request alternative instruction prior to its delivery in the classroom.

E. While the School District will make every effort to provide advance notice of the introduction of controversial issues or subjects to students in the classroom or educational setting, it also is recognized that controversial issues, by their nature, cannot always be easily identified or anticipated. What may be considered a controversial issue may be subject to reasonable interpretation. A controversial issue also may arise in a classroom or other educational setting without advance notice to the classroom instructor. Therefore, while it is the policy of the School District to provide advance notice of the instruction of a controversial issue to parents, guardians or adult students when possible, the School District does not represent or guarantee that advance notice of the discussion of a controversial issue in the classroom or other educational setting will be provided in all situations.

F. A parent, guardian, or adult student who objects to the content of instruction in the classroom or other educational setting may make reasonable arrangements with school personnel for alternative instruction by contacting the classroom teacher at least one day prior to the delivery of the objectionable instruction in the classroom.

1. The classroom teacher, when requested to do so by the parent, guardian or adult student, shall determine the form, content and manner of instruction of the alternative instruction.

2. If the alternative instruction offered by the classroom teacher does not meet the concerns of the parent, guardian or adult student, the parent, guardian or adult student may provide alternative instruction for the student. The School District will not be responsible for the costs of alternative instruction provided by the parent, guardian or adult student.

3. The classroom teacher may evaluate and assess the quality of the student's work provided through alternative instruction.

4. School personnel may not impose academic or other penalty upon a student merely for arranging alternative instruction under this policy.

**Cross References**: NB Policy 603 Curriculum Development
NB Policy 604 Instructional Curriculum
NB Policy 606 Textbooks and Instructional Materials
NB Policy 620 Credit for Learning



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