

## **File: IMB-R - CRITERIA FOR THE TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND THE USE OF CONTROVERSIAL MATERIALS**

### **Responsibilities**

Teaching about controversial issues, all of which may contain a significant emotional element, requires the recognition and acceptance of responsibilities by all persons concerned, including students, teachers, administrators, and patrons of the District.

1. **Students:** Student responsibilities begin with a willingness to examine objectively one's own point of view and to make a concerted effort to understand the reasons for differing points of view. Such willingness is basic to working effectively with others on issues of common concern but with divergent possible solutions. Responsibilities relating to the basic premise are further emphasized in the recognition that people may differ without malice, without the disruption of emotional outbursts, and without impugning the character or integrity of those who have differing opinions.

2. **Teachers:** The effectiveness of the educational program in achieving the objectives set forth in this policy statement is primarily dependent upon the classroom teachers. Teachers have the obligation to facilitate such issues in a professional manner, fostering an atmosphere in which students feel free to form and express their own points of view. In teaching about controversial issues, teachers shall work cooperatively with the building principal. In this regard, specific responsibilities of the teacher include:

- a. To obtain approval from the building principal prior to the use of any controversial materials not in the District's approved resources. If a teacher has a question regarding whether an issue or resource is controversial within the meaning of this policy, the teacher shall consult with the principal. The principal may instruct the teacher to notify students' parents/guardians and obtain parents/guardians' permission prior to discussing a controversial issue and/or using controversial materials. Politically charged controversial topics shall not be taught at the elementary level.
- b. To inform the principal by the end of instructional day of controversial issues that arise unexpectedly which cause or are likely to cause concern for students and/or their parents/guardians. The principal may instruct the teacher to notify students' parents/guardians of the circumstances.
- c. To determine the necessity of the issue or material with respect to the District adopted academic standards, course objectives, and the knowledge, age, maturity, and ability of the students. Instructional value from the use of the controversial material must outweigh the potential to cause concern for students and/or their parents/guardians.
- d. To provide information for students and parents/guardians on topics taught within the classroom. At a minimum, course topics shall be shared through a semester syllabus distributed electronically to students and parents/guardians at the start of each semester at the secondary level and at the start of each quarter at the elementary level.
- e. To know and uphold opt-in and opt-out policies defined through WPSD Administrative Policy.
- f. To be thoughtful to the impact on students, parents/guardians, and the community and to be judicious in treatment of the controversial issue.
- g. To ensure a balanced presentation through the careful selection of materials, guest speakers, and other instructional resources.
- h. To label their opinion as such when it is expressed as a personal point of view. Teachers may respond to unsolicited questions regarding their personal viewpoints and opinions; however, they also have the obligation to be objective and impartially present the various sides of an issue and not persuade students to their own viewpoint.
- i. To teach students the skills required for analysis of complex issues and to provide a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable developing and expressing their own points of view.

j. To provide an equivalent alternative learning activity/demonstration of learning at the request of a student or the student's parent/guardian. Student requests shall be verified by school staff with the parent/guardian.

3. **Administration:** The administration shall have the following responsibilities:

- a. To notify and train staff of this policy and all opt-in/opt-out policies defined through WPSD Administrative Policy, hold staff accountable to such, and address questions as they arise.
- b. To consult with the teachers concerning the appropriateness of proposed content, materials, and methods of teaching about controversial issues.
- c. To consult with teachers when controversial issues arise unexpectedly which cause or are likely to cause concern for students and/or their parents/guardians. The principal may instruct the teacher to notify students' parents/guardians of the circumstances.
- d. To support and protect teachers from undue and unjustified criticism that might arise from dealing with controversial issues in the classroom.
- e. To identify and denote high school courses in the course catalog which inherently address controversial issues.
- f. To ensure that the instructional program is not exploited by special interest groups or pressure tactics. (This does not preclude the utilization of guest speakers to present different points of view as long as the prior approval of the principal is secured.)
- g. To seek guidance from Legal Relations whenever the presentation of a controversial issue has been challenged on legal grounds or threatens the orderly operation of the school.

4. **Parents and Guardians:** Parents and guardians of students of Woodland Park School District are responsible:

- a. To review the electronic communication, including the course catalog, syllabus, and/or unit outline, and request hard copies or seek additional information as needed from school personnel.
- b. To inform the teacher in writing of their desire to request an alternative learning experience for their students.
- c. To inform the teacher, principal, and/or other appropriate District personnel when they have concern for controversial issues that are facilitated in an inappropriate manner.
- d. To recognize that concerns and questions are most quickly addressed at the level closest to the origin of the concern (i.e. classroom concerns handled with a classroom teacher).

### **Complaint Procedures**

Any person having a complaint related to any matter within the scope of this policy may seek review through the procedures set forth in Policy [KEC](#), Public Concerns/Complaints About Instructional Resources, or Policy KEF, Public Concerns/Complaints About Teaching Methods, Activities, or Presentations.

Adopted: 08/22