

**CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

Free discussion of controversial issues--political, economic, social -- shall be encouraged in the classroom whenever appropriate for the level of the group.

Issues may be considered controversial which arouse strong reactions, based either on personal conviction or allegiance to a group. School treatment of controversial issues shall be designed to instruct pupils in fair and objective study techniques. The decision on whether a particular controversial issue shall become a matter for school study shall be based on the timeliness of the question, the maturity and needs of the pupils and the purposes of the schools. Classroom discussions on controversial questions which arise unexpectedly shall be the responsibility of the teacher, who shall provide relevant information on both sides of the question. Such discussions shall be kept free from the assumption that there is one correct answer which should emerge from a discussion and be taught authoritatively to the pupils. Curriculum must be presented in a balanced and impartial manner.

Pupils shall be taught to recognize each other's right to form an opinion on controversial issues, and shall be assured of their own right to do so without jeopardizing their relationship with the teacher or the school.

When public employees make statements pursuant to their official duties; in the classroom, at board meetings, and at other meetings related to educational issues affecting the district, the employees are not speaking as citizens for First Amendment purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications for employer discipline (Garcetti v. Ceballos).

The building principal shall have the authority to limit or suspend discussion of controversial issues pending a review of the issue/materials. Instructional materials not previously approved must be reviewed by the principal before being introduced into the classroom.

**Date Reviewed: May 21, 2008**

**Adopted: August 20, 2008**

**Legal References:** Use legal reference sheet..

**Key Words:** Controversial Issues, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, Censorship

Legal References

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**Other Reasons:**

Common sense indicates the advisability of having a policy stating board philosophy on dealing with controversial issues in the classroom.

**Recommendation:**

A policy addressing controversial issues in the classroom should also address the introduction of materials not included in curriculum guides. It may appoint a reviewing authority--usually the superintendent or principal.

**Legal References:**

N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1	General mandatory powers and duties
N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20	Powers of board (county vocational schools)
N.J.A.C. 6:8-2.1(a)4i	State educational goals

Tenure Hearing of William Lee Johnson, Clearview Regional School District, 79 S.L.D. 267; 79 S.L.D. 273  
aff'd with deletion of paragraph

**Possible Cross References:**

*1312	Community complaints and inquiries
5145	Rights
*6141.2	Recognition of religious beliefs and customs
*6145.3	Publications
*6161.1	Guidelines for evaluation and selection of instructional materials
*6161.2	Complaints regarding instructional materials

\*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.

NJSBA POLICY UNIT

New Jersey School Boards Association, P.O. Box 909, Trenton, NJ 08605-0909

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