

WESTFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Westfield, New Jersey 07090

PROGRAM
2240
Controversial Issues

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2240 – CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Board of Education believes that the consideration of controversial issues has a legitimate place in the instructional program of the schools. Properly introduced and conducted, the consideration of such issues can help pupils learn to identify important issues, explore fully and fairly all sides of an issue, weigh carefully the values and factors involved, and develop techniques for formulating and evaluating positions.

For purposes of this policy a “controversial issue” is a topic which:

1. opposing points of view have been expressed by responsible and thoughtful persons;
2. is likely to arouse both support and opposition in the community;
3. is not expressly enumerated in the course guide as appropriate for the course of study; and/or
4. is subject to interpretation as obscene, profane, doctrinaire, or grossly inappropriate, each in relation to the level of maturity of the pupils concerned.

The Board will permit the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues provided that their use in the instructional program is related to the instructional goals of the course of study and level of maturity of the pupils. The discussion of controversial issues must not indoctrinate pupils or seek to persuade them to a particular point of view. Instead, teachers must encourage fair presentation and open-mindedness and the free exchange of ideas in a spirit of scholarly inquiry, drawing upon information and insights from the widest feasible range of resources.

Classroom Discussions

The presentation and discussion of controversial issues in the classroom must be on an informative basis. Teachers must guard against giving their personal opinions on sectarian or political questions or any other controversial issues until the pupils have had the opportunity to:

1. Find, collect, and assemble factual materials on the subject;
2. Interpret the data without prejudice;
3. Reconsider assumptions and claims;
4. Reach their own conclusions.

By refraining from expressing personal views before and during the period of research and study, the teacher encourages the pupils to search after truth and to think for themselves. The development of an ability to meet issues without prejudice and to withhold judgments while facts are being collected,

assembled, and weighed and relationships seen before drawing inferences or conclusions is among the most valuable outcomes of a free educational system.

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 that should emerge from a discussion and be taught authoritatively to the pupils.

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. Any discussion of controversial issues in the classroom shall be conducted in an unprejudiced and dispassionate manner designed to foster a spirit of inquiry. Such discussion shall not:

1. Disrupt the educational process;
2. Fail to match the maturity level of the pupils;
3. Be unrelated to the goals of the board and the appropriate curriculum guide;
4. Present any one opinion as definitive.

Prior Approval

If teachers wish to supplement the course guide with material that may be of a controversial nature, i.e., subject to interpretation as obscene, profane, doctrinaire or inappropriate, each in relation to the maturity level of the class, they should review the material with their supervisor, school principal and/or superintendent first.

The Superintendent, or designee, shall assist teaching staff members in developing an alertness and sensitivity to the occurrence of controversial issues in the context of the curriculum and developing techniques for the management of controversial issues that do not stifle a spirit of free inquiry.

Guest Speakers

In determining speakers to be invited for a class or school-wide program, the teacher must consider whether:

1. The speaker is controversial for any reason;
2. The topic is controversial, or sensitive, or known to arouse strong community feelings;
3. The proposed speaker would gain an advantage by having a “captive” audience.

Employee Rights Limited

When public employees make required 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 private citizens for First Amendment purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications from employer discipline (*Garcetti v. Ceballos*, 547 U.S. 410 (2006)).

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2510 – ADOPTION OF TEXTBOOKS

The Board of Education shall approve all textbooks used in the educational program of this district. For the purposes of this policy, the term "textbook" shall be defined as all purchased sources of instructional material for any given course, which are available or distributed to every pupil enrolled in the course or all pupils enrolled in any course section.

The Superintendent, or designee, shall be responsible for the selection and recommendation of textbooks for Board consideration. However, the Board retains the right to approve instructional materials not recommended by the Superintendent, provided those materials have been evaluated in accordance with this policy for alignment with course objectives, and to request that a specific textbook or instructional material be evaluated, per this policy.

In considering the approval of any proposed textbook, the Board shall weigh the following factors:

1. Value as a learning tool as evidenced by Superintendent recommendation;
2. Suitability for use based upon the maturity level and educational accomplishment of the pupils who will be using the book;
3. Freedom from bias, excepting where bias is unavoidable, in such case the overall bias of all course resources shall be considered and balance struck where feasible;
4. Alignment with specific curriculum standards and objectives of a course of study adopted by the Board and its relationship to a continuous multi-grade program, as applicable;
5. Impact on community standards of taste;
6. Manner by which it was selected; and
7. Unit cost, appearance, durability and weight of printed textbooks, or the price of perpetual licensing for digital textbooks, if available, and/or subscription-based licensure for a minimum of five years.

The Superintendent shall develop regulations for the selection of textbooks that include effective consultation with professional staff members at all appropriate levels.

1. The staff shall continually research new sources of textbooks and explore the innovative use of all possible books.
2. Textbooks currently in use shall be periodically evaluated for their continuing usefulness and relevance and shall be replaced or updated with new editions as often as necessary to meet the needs of pupils and the curriculum.

3. Textbooks with copyright dates more than five years old shall be reviewed annually for their continuing suitability.

A list of all approved textbooks shall be maintained and revised annually by the Superintendent or designee and made available for the use of teaching staff members and for the information of members of the Board and the public. When appropriate, textbooks and accompanying district evaluation data will be available for review at the Board's discretion. A public request for the removal of textbooks or instructional materials will be governed by Policy 9130 Public Complaints and Grievances.

N.J.S.A. 18A:34-1; 18A:34-2

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R 2510 TEXTBOOK SELECTION AND ADOPTION

1. Teaching staff members involved in the use of particular basic texts will play a primary role in the textbook selection.
2. In selecting the textbooks or textbooks for a level or area of study, the Principal or supervisor will organize a textbook selection committee. The school librarian shall be included on this committee when appropriate.
3. All textbooks available will be evaluated according to established course objectives; reading level and the target student population will be considered. Texts will also undergo a technical analysis to assure that materials will be inclusive. Each evaluation will be conducted using the district-approved evaluation forms.
4. A textbook committee may recommend that a new textbook be field tested in a class or section prior to recommendation of district adoption. The Superintendent shall approve the field test and inform the Curriculum Committee of the Board.
5. After a thorough evaluation of available textbooks and with the advice of principals, department chairpersons, supervisors, and other resource persons, recommendations for text adoption will be submitted to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Programs for review and analysis.
6. Final recommendations for adoption will be submitted to the Superintendent. If the recommendations are accepted by the Superintendent they will be recommended to the Board of Education for approval.
7. The Board of Education will give final approval on textbooks to be adopted.

The Superintendent shall recommend to the Board all textbooks to be used in the schools.