

INSTRUCTION

Standard Instructional Program

Controversial Issues

This regulation supersedes Regulation 3280.3.

I. PURPOSE

To provide guidelines for school-based and non-school-based administrators, teachers and students in dealing with controversial issues in ways that develop critical-thinking skills and reflect sensitivity to the emotions often engendered by such issues.

II. SUMMARY OF CHANGES SINCE LAST PUBLICATION

Reference to Regulation 4426 has been added for additional guidance and other references have been updated.

III. PHILOSOPHY

The preparation for effective citizenship includes the study of issues that are controversial. The study of controversial issues shall be conducted in an atmosphere in which knowledge can be freely imparted and the critical thinking of students can be developed through research and classroom discussion within the guidelines of the Program of Studies.

IV. DEFINITION

- A. An issue is controversial when there are substantial differences of opinion about it on the local, national, or international level and when these differences of opinion are accompanied by intense feelings and strong emotions on the part of individuals or groups.
- B. Whenever there is doubt about the controversial nature of any particular topic, teachers, students, or student groups should consult with the principal to determine the degree of sensitivity of the school community regarding the issue.

V. ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Teachers should use the following guidelines in dealing with controversial topics in the instructional program:

- A. Address controversial topics as impartially and objectively as possible. Do not let personal biases intrude or allow personal beliefs to interfere with professional judgment.
- B. Handle controversial issues in a manner relevant to the content of the course and appropriate to the knowledge and maturity of the students.
- C. When there is doubt about the impact of a controversial issue in planned instruction, inform the principal about the situation and provide a brief outline of the instructional strategies that will be used to ensure objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and relevance to Program of Studies objectives.
- D. Encourage critical thinking by offering multiple perspectives of the issue(s) under discussion, gathering information and evidence, considering implications and consequences of varying viewpoints, checking for assumptions, and using questions to guide ideas and clarify thinking.
- E. Do not expect or require that students reach an agreement.
- F. Be sensitive to students with feelings and emotions surrounding a controversial issue, and contact school counselors, if appropriate.
- G. When an unanticipated problem arises from a discussion of a controversial issue, consult with the principal for appropriate follow-up.

VI. SPEAKERS ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

- A. All invitations to guest speakers on controversial issues must be approved by the principal. The teacher, student, or student group desiring to invite a guest speaker must outline for the principal the following:
 - 1. The expected contribution of the speaker to Program of Studies objectives.
 - 2. Plans for preliminary and follow-up discussions and activities designed to help students put the speaker's view into context and perspective.
 - 3. Provisions for fair treatment of the views of the speaker and of differing opinions.
 - 4. The intended audience.
- B. Teachers should consult with the principal as to the advisability of informing parents about the controversial speaker.
- C. Students from other classes who have not been involved in preparatory activities should not attend the presentation. Any exception needs the principal's approval.
- D. When a guest speaker is scheduled for a presentation other than in a regular class

setting, the principal will determine the appropriateness of the proposed forum for that presentation.

- E. Candidates for political office or their representatives may be scheduled as guest speakers in keeping with the above guidelines, and the candidate(s) opponent should be provided an opportunity to speak as well.

VII. DISTRIBUTION AND DISPLAY OF LITERATURE ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

- A. The principal shall determine the appropriate time, place, and manner for distribution and/or display of materials about controversial issues, including political literature. The current version of Regulation 1367 governs the distribution of fliers and other informational materials.
- B. Paid political advertisements may be placed in a school newspaper subject to approval of the principal.
- C. Materials proposing specific violent tactics and/or disruption of government activities, including public education, are not allowed. Expression of student opinion may not be used to present material that is obscene or slanderous, to defame character, or to advocate violation of federal, state, and local laws or official school policies, rules, and regulations.

See also the current versions of: Regulation 1367, Distribution of Fliers or Other Informational Materials, Nonprofits Organizations' Access, and Procedures for Contests and Competitions
Regulation 1370, Local School Organization and Administration Fund Raising
Regulation 3005, Program and Supplemental Instructional Print Materials Identification, Evaluation, and Approval
Policy 3203, Health Instruction
Regulation 3204, Family Life Instruction
Regulation 4426, Schools and Employee Political Activities