

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL OR SENSITIVE ISSUES

The Nye County School District Board of Trustees recognizes that an important function of public education is to provide students with an understanding of how controversial issues are dealt with in a democracy by individuals or groups of people. This includes the opportunity to learn about the issues, problems and concerns of contemporary society; to form opinions; and to participate in discussion of these issues and expressions of opinion in the classroom setting.

Controversial issues include matters characterized by significant differences of opinion, usually generated from differing and underlying values, beliefs and interests, which produce significant social tension. Controversy arising from such differences is inherent in a pluralistic society. Examples of controversial or sensitive issues include abortion, origin of man, religion or sexual orientation.

The Nye County School District Board of Trustees expects teachers to adhere to the following guidelines when teaching about controversial or sensitive issues and to act in conformance with State law and all other District policies. Substitutes should refrain from discussing controversial issues but should make the regular classroom teacher aware the subject arose.

It is recognized that discussion of sensitive issues may arise outside the classroom during extra-curricular activities or during other forums within the school building or outside of the school, wherever school or school-related groups are involved. The same guidelines will apply to such discussions.

1. Instruction must Follow the Approved Curriculum and be Appropriate for Students.

The overriding educational purpose of teaching about controversial issues or using controversial materials must be student achievement in the academic subjects and students' civic development, rather than reaching conclusions as to the correctness of any particular point of view. The teacher must consider the maturity of the students and whether the subject and materials presented are age appropriate, take into account the values of the community, use sound professional judgment and coordinate with school administration.

2. Guidelines on Presenting Controversial Issues.

Whenever controversial issues are taught, the teacher should make materials available to students concerning the various aspects of the issue. Teachers may express their own viewpoints and opinions while keeping in mind that some students are more impressionable than others. However, teachers must remain professionally ethical, explain their reasons clearly, be open to challenge, and present each side of an issue impartially. Teachers needn't necessarily get the principal's approval each time a controversial issue comes

up, but they are encouraged to work cooperatively with the principal ahead of time to decide the best way to teach about controversial issues.

3. Use of Learning Resources.

Teachers may use only those learning resources that are approved by the District. Teachers may not use materials that are controversial because of the manner or context in which controversial issues are discussed. Examples of such materials include, but are not limited to, those that depict explicit sexual conduct, graphic violence, profanities, drug use or other socially undesirable behaviors, or materials that are likely to divide the community along racial, ethnic or religious lines. Any questions regarding the appropriateness of materials should be directed to the site administrator.

4. Teacher Discretion

Students will occasionally ask questions on issues not part of the curriculum that may be controversial in nature or inappropriate to classroom discussions. Teachers may refer these questions to parents and/or guidance counselors or principals.

5. Discipline for Inappropriately Teaching Controversial Issues.

Legally, the Superintendent and Board of Trustees have discretion and final authority in deciding whether discussion of a controversial issue follows established professional ethics, content standards and curriculum, and is appropriate for students. If, after an investigation to determine what the teacher said in class and how the students reacted, the Superintendent and/or Board believe that a teacher did not follow the guidelines stated in this policy, appropriate penalties and discipline will result in accordance with the Master Contract, up to and including termination of employment.

Reviewed: May 15, 2013
Adopted: November 19, 2003
Revised: June 25, 2013

NEPN/NSBA Classification: IMB
Legal Reference: NRS 391.312