

**WAUNAKEE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING**

Monday, May 1, 2023

8:30 AM

Waunakee Community School District
905 Bethel Circle
Waunakee, WI 53597

Members of the public may attend Board of Education meetings in-person, and will be asked to check in with District personnel when you arrive.

Public comments will be limited to 3 minutes. The Board will allow 30 Minutes for public comments.

Public comments may be sent to Rebecca McDonough at district_administrator@waunakee.k12.wi.us up to one hour before the start of the Board meeting. All comments will be reviewed by the Board members. Emailed comments will be reviewed by the board but not read out loud. Emailed comments sent during any part of the board meeting (Board Development, Closed session, Open session) will be forwarded to the board but may or may not be reviewed by the board until after the board adjourns. Comments must include the commentator's name, address, and must identify their connection to the District (if any) and any group they are representing in order to be considered by the Board.

If you would like to address the Board in-person during the public comments section of the meeting, you will be greeted in the lobby of the building, asked to check in with District personnel when you arrive so that you can be recognized and address the Board when your name is called.

A recording of the meeting will be posted on the District webpage within 24 hours of the meeting time.

AGENDA

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. APPROVE AGENDA

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

V. POLICIES FOR DISCUSSION, REVIEW, AND CONSIDERATION **3**

Attached please find the Policy summary grid information regarding Policy 381.

A. Policy 381 Teaching about Controversial Issues **4**

Attached please find the following:

- The current posted version of Policy 381
- The WASB PRG version of Policy 381
- The WCSB Curriculum Department Blended version of Policy 381
- The WCSB Sensitive Topics Resource Guide to consider for an Exhibit
- The WCSB Resource Flow Chart to consider for an Exhibit

VI. FUTURE MEETINGS

Upcoming meetings:

May 18 @ 7:30am

VII. ADJOURN

“Any person who has a qualifying disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act who requires assistance with access or materials should contact the Waunakee Community School District Office at 849-2000, 905 Bethel Circle Drive Waunakee, WI 53597, at least twenty-four hours prior to the commencement of the meeting so that necessary arrangements can be made to accommodate the request.”

381	Teaching about Controversial Issues	381	Either keep current policy or replace with PRG 381	<p>Your current policy 381 is acceptable. Teaching about controversial issues is a curriculum question and primarily a local policy decision. There is a PRG sample that I included in the proposed policies, but that sample makes some different policy choices than those reflected in your current policy 381. You and your board will need to decide if you wish to keep your current policy or edit the PRG policy sample. Note there is also a PRG 381 Rule 1 that you might wish to consider.</p>	<p>Keep Current Policy</p> <p>X</p>	<p>Keep Current version</p>
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TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The consideration of controversial questions shall have a legitimate place in the work of the Waunakee Schools. Young people must meet and face such questions in order to gain experience in handling them under circumstances that promote consideration of all pertinent factors.

The decision as to whether a controversial question shall become a part of school curriculum shall be based on such considerations as the timeliness of the question, the maturity of the students, the needs of the students, and the philosophy and goals of the Waunakee Community School District.

Questions regarding controversial issues should be addressed to the building principal. Questions not resolved by the building principal should be submitted to the superintendent in writing who shall act upon the question and report his/her actions to the Board of Education. The Board shall have final authority regarding questions arising from teaching about controversial issues.

Legal Ref.: Sections 118.01(2)(d) Wisconsin Statutes
118.019

Cross Ref.: 110, Educational Mission Statement
381.1, Teaching About Religion
310, Instructional Goals
341.3-Rule, Health Education Parental Objection
341.31, Family Life Education (Human Growth and Development)
411.1, Equal Educational Opportunities
871, Public Complaints About the Curriculum or Instructional Materials

Adopted: 11/8/82

Revised: March 1994
January 2002

Waunakee Community School District

ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES WITH STUDENTS IN CLASSES AND OTHER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

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~~*(This sample policy affirms that the exploration of controversial issues by and with students serves a number of valid and important educational objectives, while also recognizing that the appropriate approach to a controversial topic or issue will be highly context sensitive. This sample sets forth an expectation that district employees will exercise sound professional judgment in a manner that applies general guidelines in specific contexts.)*~~

On both a planned and unplanned basis, the education process sometimes encounters topics that are considered controversial, such as when a topic:

1. Can reasonably be expected to make individuals in a class or other group feel uncomfortable, distressed, or even threatened;
2. Tends to elicit strong emotional reactions;
3. Challenges a person's assumptions or personal beliefs;
4. Creates or reveals real or perceived division based on differing beliefs, values, life experiences, or points of view;
5. Presents a problem over which there is significant, and often even emotional, disagreement regarding the appropriate solution; and/or
6. May cause some parents and guardians to question the school's role in addressing the topic with their child, and the potential for eliciting such a reaction is reasonably foreseeable.

Controversial topics and issues, as addressed by this policy, generally touch on matters of significant social, moral, and/or ethical consequence and can include sensitive matters dealing with race, sexuality, religion, politics, social violence, or a recent tragedy, but controversial topics can also be encountered in areas such as science, history, literature, and art.

The appropriate and acceptable approaches to the presentation, discussion, and analysis of potentially controversial topics by educators within a class or other school activity will vary depending on factors such as the specific topic, the context in which the topic arises (who, how, when, etc.), and the age of the students involved in the instruction or discussion. While the exploration of controversial topics can serve a number of valid and important educational objectives, in some situations the appropriate decision will be for a teacher or other educator to not engage students on the topic or issue.

When considering how to approach controversial topics and issues, District employees are expected to exercise sound professional judgment in a manner that is consistent with the specific context and with the following general guidelines and any additional administrative guidelines that may be implemented:

~~*Editor's Note: The general guidelines listed below are presented as examples. The list can be modified to better reflect local expectations. In addition, some districts may prefer to adjust the*~~

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wording of the sample so that all of the guidelines that appear in the list below can be converted into an administrative rule.)¹

1. When a controversial topic is an inherent part of a prescribed curriculum *insert example, if applicable: "(e.g., human growth and development)"*, the employees who are responsible for implementing the curriculum are expected to teach about the topic in a manner that adheres to and that is consistent with the prescribed curriculum.
2. When either the approved curriculum or a supervising administrator directs an employee to avoid teaching or addressing a controversial topic/issue with students in a particular context, the employee is expected to adhere to such directives. The employee should address any concerns about such a directive to a supervising administrator.
3. Teachers are generally expected to avoid the pursuit of controversial topics that have no substantial connection to the curriculum the teacher is charged with delivering. For example, in a math class, a math teacher should not direct a learning activity about religion and religious controversies. An exception to this general rule may apply when, for example, a school administrator or leadership team directs or approves the examination of an issue of immediate concern that students are having to process. A school-to-parent communication is normally appropriate when such an exceptional situation arises unexpectedly.
4. District employees may not use their position to attempt to indoctrinate or convince students to adopt the employee's personal beliefs or personal world view with respect to controversial subjects/issues. District employees also shall not demonstrate any improper favoritism toward students who may share or who express support for beliefs, positions, or opinions on controversial issues that are consistent with those held by the employee.
5. Although it will often be appropriate for educators to avoid revealing their personal opinions, positions, or beliefs to students on a controversial topic or issue, if an educator determines that circumstances exist that justify making such a disclosure, the educator is expected to do so in a manner that does not denigrate the legitimacy of other positions/responses.
6. Within a class or other school-sponsored activity that explores a controversial issue, the District's expectation is that the educator who is responsible for the class or activity will serve as a facilitator who does not exhibit bias and who strives to conduct the learning activity and direct the related discussion in a manner that is respectful, non-threatening, productive (e.g., focusing on inquiry, analysis, and synthesis of information), and developmentally appropriate.
7. Teachers and other staff members are expected to proceed with particular caution with younger students, as such students generally are less able to understand and process the complexities that underlie many controversial issues and can be more susceptible to being

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¹ Note that the paragraph above and everything below this editor's note are local policy choices – the board and administration should carefully review this entire policy and determine if it works for your district.

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unduly influenced and/or believing they are expected to adopt a particular position or belief, even when that is not the intent.

8. Prior to introducing a lesson, unit, or activity that will involve a controversial topic or issue, educators are expected to determine whether any applicable law or District policy or procedure requires staff to take steps such as obtaining advance administrative approval, providing advance parent and guardian notice, obtaining parental consent, or providing an opportunity for a parent or guardian (or adult student) to opt-out of participation. For example, federal law and related District policies require, at a minimum, parent notice and an opt-out opportunity prior to the administration of certain "protected information" surveys to students (i.e., surveys that address certain controversial or otherwise-sensitive topics).
9. Even when there is no law or District policy or procedure that expressly requires such steps, when an educator plans or is required to introduce or cover controversial issues with students, the educator should consider the extent to which it may be appropriate to (a) communicate with parents and guardians about the topic and the activities that will be taking place (whether in advance and/or after the fact), and/or (b) offer and respond to individual requests for alternative materials, lessons, or other accommodations. In making such determinations, educators are encouraged to discuss the matter with a supervising administrator and to evaluate any previous experiences with similar circumstances.
10. Educators are expected to follow established District procedures that apply to the selection and approval of guest speakers and to supplemental media or other similar supplemental content that they specifically assign or present to students. Appropriate advance review and screening of such materials will help to identify and evaluate potentially controversial content.
11. Instructional activities and discussions within a class or other school activity that address controversial issues will be most appropriate when there is a clear curricular connection, a defined and developmentally-appropriate educational purpose/goal, an intentional structure for the activity, and appropriate communication about the activity.
12. Educators who are unsure whether or how to approach a controversial issue in a class or other school activity are expected to communicate such concerns to a supervising administrator who has curricular responsibilities.
13. Educators are expected to notify a supervising administrator if a parent or guardian complains that the teacher or other representative of the school improperly handled a controversial issue or topic.

The guidelines and expectations listed above do not prevent District employees from addressing and requiring students to identify a District-prescribed curricular position, even if some individuals would assert that the curricular position is controversial or incorrect.

Parents and guardians should be aware that, consistent with this policy, the Board's position is that it is neither necessary nor desirable for District educators to attempt to avoid addressing all controversial issues and topics with students. Further, it is not practical for District educators to

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provide advance notice of every topic or issue that will be covered or discussed in a class or other school activity.

When a student has encountered, or when it is known that a student will soon encounter, a controversial issue or topic in a school setting, parents and guardians are encouraged to contact District staff to identify concerns or provide feedback and to directly discuss the issue or topic with their child in the context of the family's values and beliefs.

Legal References:

Wisconsin Statutes

- [Section 118.13](#) [student nondiscrimination]
- [Section 118.01\(2\)\(d\)2c](#) [student exemption from certain health education activities]
- [Section 118.019](#) [human growth and development instruction]

Wisconsin Administrative Code

- [PL 9](#) [student nondiscrimination]

Federal Laws

- [20 U.S.C. §1232\(h\)](#) [Protection of Pupil Rights Provision of General Education Provisions; various privacy and parent's rights mandates]

Cross References:

- [110, Educational Mission Statement](#)
 - [381.1, Teaching About Religion](#)
 - [310, Instructional Goals](#)
 - [341.3-Rule, Health Education Parental Objection](#)
 - [341.31, Family Life Education \(Human Growth and Development\)](#)
 - [411.1, Equal Educational Opportunities](#)
 - [871, Public Complaints About the Curriculum or Instructional Materials](#)
- WASB PRG Sample Policy 1

Adoption Date: ~~11/8/82~~

Revised: ~~March 1994~~

January 2002

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TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

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Teachers are generally expected to avoid the pursuit of controversial topics that have no substantial connection to the curriculum the teacher is charged with delivering. For example, in a math class, a math teacher should not direct a learning activity about religion and religious controversies. An exception to this general rule may apply when, for example, a school administrator or leadership team directs or approve the examination of an issue of immediate concern that students are having to process. A school-home communication is normally appropriate when such an exceptional situation arises unexpectedly. However, it is not practical for District educators to provide advance notice of every topic or issue that will be covered or discussed in a class or other school activity.

The decision as to whether a controversial question shall become a part of school curriculum shall be based on such considerations as the timeliness of the question, the maturity of the students, the needs of the students, and the philosophy and goals of the Waunakee Community School District.

District employees may not use their position to attempt to indoctrinate or convince students to adopt the employee's personal beliefs or personal world view with respect to controversial subjects/issues. District employees also shall not demonstrate any improper favoritism toward students who may share or who express support for beliefs, positions, or opinions on controversial issues that are consistent with those held by the employee.

Although it will often be appropriate for educators to avoid revealing their personal opinions, positions, or beliefs to students on a controversial topic or issue, if an educator determines that circumstances exist that justify making such a disclosure, the educator is expected to do so in a manner that does not denigrate the legitimacy of other positions/responses.

Educators who are unsure whether or how to approach a controversial issue in a class or other school activity are expected to communicate such concerns to the building principal. Educators are expected to notify a supervising administrator if a parent or guardian complains that the teacher or other representative of the school improperly handled a controversial issue or topic.

Questions regarding controversial issues should be addressed to the building principal. Questions not resolved by the building principal should be submitted to the superintendent in writing who shall act upon the question and report his/her actions to the Board of Education. The Board shall have final authority regarding questions arising from teaching about controversial issues.

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Waunakee Community School District

Sensitive Topics in the Learning Community

WCSD Guide to Lesson Planning and Resource Selection

Careful planning is paramount in our efforts to create inclusive teaching and learning environments [362](#), [362.1](#), [381](#), [871](#)

WCSD lessons and resources MUST:

- Support the grade level standards
- Be appropriate for the age and developmental level of the students
- Be accurate, current, and research-based
- Reflect sensitivity with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, social or geographical environment, intellectual and physical abilities

IF your lesson or resource includes sensitive and controversial topics like these:

- | | | | |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Slavery | Rape or sexual abuse | Political affiliation | Violence and physical abuse |
| Genocide | Gender expression | Religious affiliation | Oppressive power structures |
| Abortion | Economic hardships | Sexual orientation | Legalization of controlled substances |
| Death penalty | Immigration policy | Racial slurs & trigger speech | |

THAT IS OKAY because [students deserve true and accurate history](#).

BUT we must

- Create an environment that honors feelings and
- Ease students into these conversations

AND ANALYZE the lesson or resource ahead of time by answering:

1. Whose voices, perspectives, or experiences are **heard and centered** in this resource?
2. What **identities** are included in this resource? Consider all facets of identity: race, religion, gender, gender identity, ability, socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family structure, language, citizenship, age, political viewpoint or affiliation, etc.
3. Are hierarchies and power structures shown through this resource? **Who is benefitting** from the hierarchies and structures?
4. Who is shown to be **harmed** from these hierarchies and power structures? What consequences or forms of oppression are shown or explained?

AND REFLECT using [Readiness Indicators for Sensitive Topics](#)

ALSO

IF the lesson or resource asks students to simulate a situation where one group has power over another...

DON'T USE IT.

This could harm a student.

IF the lesson or resource includes stereotypes of a marginalized group...

ALSO SHOW that these stereotypes are harmful and aid in racist/bigoted thinking.

AND CONSULT your PLC, instructional coach, or administrator. This resource includes hard history, and you need to carefully plan trauma informed talking points.

WHAT IF?

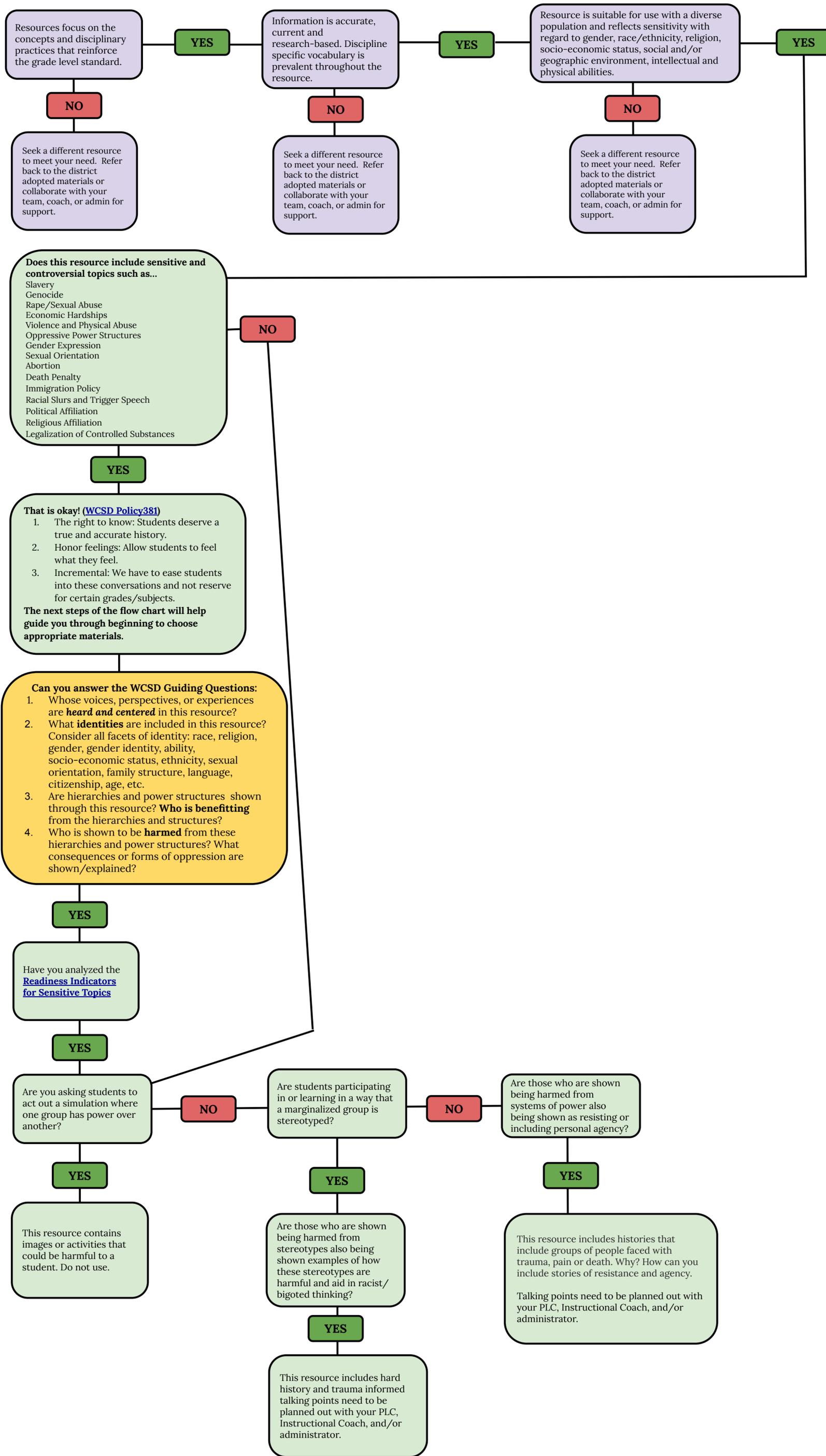
Even with thoughtful consideration, we may cause harm without intending to do so. Should anyone raise a concern related to a topic, resource, or lesson that may be causing trauma, curriculum endorsed prejudice, or any aspect of harm, staff should immediately do the following.

1. **Stop.**
2. **Apologize** for the harm you caused.
3. **Listen** empathetically to those harmed.
4. **Ask** what is needed to repair the harm.
5. **Take action** to follow through.
6. **Alert** your supervisor to the incident.
7. **Seek advice and support** from administrators, instructional coaches, and peers as needed.

WCSD Supplementary Instructional Resource Flow Chart

In accordance with WCSD Policies [361](#), [362](#), [362.1](#), [381](#), [871](#).

Originally created by: D. Fogarty & K.Lundquist 2021
Adapted from: the Sun Prairie Area School District and [The Great Lakes Equity Center](#)



Careful planning and attention to sensitive topics is paramount in our efforts to create inclusive teaching and learning environments. Even with thoughtful consideration, we may cause harm without intending to do so.

Should a concern be raised related to a topic/lesson that may be causing trauma, curriculum endorsed prejudice, or any aspect of harm, staff should immediately do the following.

1. Stop.
2. Apologize for the harm you caused.
3. Empathetically listen to the person(s) who was/were harmed.
4. Ask the person what is needed to repair the harm, and take action to follow through on their response.
5. Alert your supervisor to the incident that transpired.
6. Seek advice and support from administrators, instructional coaches, and peers as needed.