

To prepare students to be responsible citizens (of a family, a school, a community, a nation, and the world), it may be necessary for students to study issues which are controversial and offer differing points of view. Skills that are developed during such studies include critical thinking, reasoning, problem solving, active listening, and self-control. The School District of Altoona believes that students and teachers have the right to explore, present, and discuss controversial issues in order to achieve a deeper understanding of complex issues. This right is known as academic freedom.

In the study of controversial issues and materials, students have the right and/or responsibility to:

- Explore and discuss issues that have political, economic or social significance and are appropriate to their developmental level.
- Have free access to relevant information.
- Study in a classroom atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- Form and express their own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing relationships with their peers, teachers, or school.
- Learn how to respectfully discuss and debate with those who have differing opinions on the subject matter.
- Learn and practice tolerance and respect for those with differing viewpoints.
- Learn and practice self-control.

The teacher who is guiding the controversial subject shall:

- Be impartial and objective in his/her presentation.
- Teach, demonstrate, and foster tolerance and respect among those with differing viewpoints.
- Select materials suitable to the range, knowledge, maturity and competence of the students.
- Provide research, facts, and data concerning all aspects of the issue under discussion.
- Provide examples of various opinions of the subject. If the teacher expresses his or her own opinion on the subject matter, he or she should inform students that it is an opinion and not an authoritative answer.

- Treat religious, moral, and ethical values and attitudes with respect and sensitivity.

In discussing such controversial issues and/or materials, the teacher and student should understand that the classroom is a forum. The class should feel no responsibility for reaching consensus. All controversial issues discussed within the classrooms shall be relevant to the course and curriculum. If a teacher is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom, he or she shall consult with the principal. Similarly, the principal may consult with the teacher about these issues. If the teacher and principal are unable to agree, the issue shall be referred to the Superintendent for action.

If a parent/guardian feels the classroom teacher is being unfair or prejudiced, he or she should discuss the issue with that teacher. If the parent isn't satisfied with the discussion, he or she may request a meeting with the building principal and continue to follow the stated channel of communication.

LEGAL REF.: 115.35, 118.02 (1)(d), 118.019, 120.13, 121.02 (1)(h) Wisc. Statutes

PI 8.01(2)(h), PI 41 Wisc. Administrative Code

ADOPTED: 08/03/81

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