

**BEND - LA PINE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO 1
ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS
CODE: INB-AR
DATED:
REVISED:
REVIEW DATE:
REVIEWED BY:**

STUDYING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

In view of the importance attached to the free exchange of ideas in the United States, the consideration of issues on which there is public disagreement deserves a significant place in our educational process. Classroom treatment of controversial issues is generally accepted as an important part of education for effective citizenship. In fact, it is difficult to conceive of the American schools doing other than they have always done: Handling issues on which there is a difference of opinion as part of the normal day-to-day operation in a school.

It is the policy of the district to encourage an impartial, scientific study of controversial issues that result from an area of study in order that students may have the opportunity to explore such issues in a learning environment that is as free from prejudice as is humanly possible.

A controversial issue is any topic or problem on which there are differences of opinion. A controversial issue arises when different interpretations are given to a particular set of circumstances. Although there may be disagreement over facts, an issue usually becomes controversial because of values, which are applied to the facts. Such issues will vary according to region, community, prevailing political, economic, and sociological climate, and time.

The district's policy on the teaching of controversial issues is defined in the terms of the rights of students rather than in the terms of the rights of teachers. In the study of controversial issues in the public schools, the student has five rights to be recognized:

1. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance, and concerning which (at his/her level) he/she should begin to have an opinion;
2. The right to have free access to all relevant information including the materials that circulate freely in the community;
3. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice;
4. The right to form and express his/her own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his/her relations with his/her teacher or the school;
5. The right to think about and study subjects which are of current interest on the national and local scene. Expressions of concern about these matters are also

accepted as a part of the educational development of the students of the school system--provided that these expressions are lawfully and peacefully made.

GUIDELINES REGARDING TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Good teaching of subjects involving controversial issues requires particular skill, and so far as possible, particular care will be taken in assignment of teachers to subjects in which a large body of the material deals with controversy.

The approach of the teacher to controversial topics must be impartial and objective.

Teachers will use the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of controversial issues for the school curriculum:

1. The treatment of the issue in question must be within the range of the knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students;
2. There should be study materials and other learning aides available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue may be obtained;
3. The inclusion of the issue should require only as much time as needed for satisfactory study by the class, but sufficient time should be provided to cover the issue adequately;
4. The issue should be significant, real and important to students and teacher. Significant issues are those, which, in general, concern considerable numbers of people, are related to basic principles, or at the moment are under consideration by the public, press and radio.

In discussing controversial issues, the teacher will keep in mind that the classroom is a forum and not a committee for producing resolutions or dogmatic pronouncements. The class should feel no responsibility for reaching an agreement.

Although it is the teacher's responsibility to bring out the facts concerning a controversial question, he/she has the right to express his/her opinions, providing his/her students understand that it is his/her own opinion, and it is not to be accepted by them as the authoritative answer.

The principal as the administrator of his/her building bears a major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the curriculum, selection of material and methods of instruction, and, therefore, must be alert to and continuously aware, in general, of what is being taught in his/her school.

A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom and related activities should confer with his/her principal as to the appropriateness of the issue. If the principal and the teacher are unable to establish an agreement, the issue shall be referred to the superintendent.

Recognition is given to the fact that the citizens of the community have the right to protest to the school administration, when convinced that unfair and prejudiced presentations are being made by any teacher. The Board shall provide a hearing, whenever, in the judgment of the Board, materials in instruction or the work of an individual are seriously attacked by individuals or organized groups in such a manner as to interfere with the normal administration of this policy. Any teacher who is giving instruction in a field involving controversial issues is assured of the support of the Board if it has been found that such instructor has been subjected to unfair criticism or partisan pressure from individuals or groups.