

Controversial Issues in the Classroom
Board of Education
Wrightstown Community School District

The Wrightstown Community School District recognizes that helping students to become concerned, well-educated, responsible, and decision-making citizens is a major goal of the District. It values the role of public education in preparing students for effective citizenship and understands that as students prepare for active engagement in participatory democracy, controversial issues may arise that deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing views, biases, emotions, and/or conflict.

For purposes of this policy, a controversial issue is a topic on which opposing points of view have been promulgated by responsible opinion and/or likely arouse both support and opposition in the community.

The board will permit the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues provided that their use in the instructional program:

- A. is related to the instructional goals of the course of study and level of maturity of the students and is age appropriate;
- B. provides access to respect for multiple perspectives and sources that are founded in relevant and credible information;
- C. encourages open-mindedness and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry;
- D. supports discussion and building mutual understanding of the topic;
- E. maintains a learning environment that is safe, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and focused on an academic examination of the issue
- F. does not cause a substantial disruption in the school environment.

Properly previewed, introduced and conducted, the consideration of such issues can help students learn to identify important issues, explore fully and fairly all sides of an issue, weigh carefully the values and factors involved, and develop techniques for formulating and evaluating positions.

The teacher shall take care to balance major views and to assure that as many sides of the issue as possible are presented in fair, objective, and impartial manner, with no position being espoused by the teacher as the only one acceptable. The class should feel no responsibility for reaching any agreement regarding the topic. Students are able to form and express their own opinions on the issue without jeopardizing their relationship with teachers, students, or the school. In discussions, the goal of the activity is to practice civil discourse in a respectful manner and stimulate the exchange of ideas and critical thinking.

Controversial issues related to the program may be initiated by the students themselves, provided they are presented in the ordinary course of classroom instruction, related to the topic of instruction, and do not cause substantial disruption to the school environment.

The Board recognizes that a course of study or certain instructional materials may contain content that some parents find objectionable. If after careful, personal review of the program lessons and/or materials regarding either content or activities that conflict with his/her religious beliefs, an individual or group, objecting to the presence or use of particular topic or issue, should notify the classroom teacher or building principal. Upon a written request for his/her child to be excused from particular activities for the specified reasons, the school will honor the parent request to be excused. The student, however, will not be excused from participating in a course or activity mandated by the state and will be provided alternative learning activities during times of parent requested absences.

The Board encourages community stakeholders, students, school system employees, parents, service providers, and each member of the community to support the teaching of controversial issues in the classroom in order to promote the development of civic efficacy, student engagement, respectful dialogue, and critical thinking among our students.

Adopted: March 16, 2022

Reviewed:

Revised: