

Series 4000: District Employment

4200 Employee Conduct and Ethics

4221.1 Teaching Controversial Issues

The ability to discuss, listen, and dissent are essential elements of responsible citizenship. The District encourages students to develop skills in critical thinking, respecting other opinions, distinguishing between fact and opinion, engaging in respectful and civil discourse, and considering relevant factors in reaching decisions.

A “controversial issue” is a political, social, cultural, or other issue that is likely to result in opposing viewpoints in the community.

Teachers, Non-Teaching Professionals, Administrators, other employees, or classroom visitors or speakers may introduce (either directly or indirectly) controversial issues into a class, assignment, or other school-related activity if they comply with the following criteria:

- A. The issues introduced must be directly relevant to the District’s approved curriculum, part of a planned educational program, and consistent with any related state curriculum standards.
- B. The topic and materials used must be within the range, knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students. Before introducing a controversial issue, the employee should consider whether discussing the issue is appropriate for the students.
- C. Students must have access to appropriate materials and information for analysis and evaluation of the issues.
- D. Students are not required to participate in the discussion of controversial issues, to support any particular viewpoint, to disclose their personal opinion, or provide personal information. Students will not be subject to discipline, a lower grade, loss of credit, or retaliation based on their refusal to participate in a discussion on controversial issues.
- E. Student conduct that substantially disrupts school activities or where the administration may reasonably forecast a substantial disruption to school activities is subject to discipline.
- F. Students are provided a variety of viewpoints for consideration and discussion.
- G. Employees must receive approval from the building principal before introducing controversial issues in a class, assignment, or other school-related activity that is not part of the District-approved curriculum or activity. If the employee disagrees with the building principal as to whether a controversial issue should be introduced, the matter will be referred to the Superintendent or designee, who will make a final determination on the matter. Pending the Superintendent or designee’s determination, the controversial issue shall not be introduced.

- H. For a building principal, the principal must inform the Superintendent before introducing controversial issues in a class, assignment, or other school-related activity that is not part of the District-approved curriculum or activity. The Superintendent or designee will determine whether the issue should be introduced. Pending the Superintendent or designee's determination, the controversial issue shall not be introduced.
- I. The employee must keep detailed, documentary evidence to prove that both sides and all facts available were presented to students.
- J. Employees must refrain from advocating or endorsing partisan causes, political candidates, or sectarian religious views. An employee may express a personal opinion on issues relevant to the curriculum or planned educational program if the student is encouraged to reach the student's own decision independently.
- K. If a student requests to lead a classroom discussion on a controversial issue, the employee should ensure that the issue relates to the curriculum or planned educational program, is appropriate for the class or grade level, student age, and maturity, and does not disrupt the classroom.
- L. Class discussions or assignments concerning or pertaining to sexual activity, abortion, contraceptives, or other areas of sex education are restricted to classes authorized by the administration to address that subject matter.

If a parent files a complaint regarding a controversial issue raised in class, in a class assignment, or at a school-sponsored event, the complaint shall be promptly reported to the building principal, and the Superintendent or designee will discuss the parent's complaint and potential remedies with the parent and the impacted employee(s).

An employee who violates this Policy may be subject to discipline, up to and including discharge.

Legal Authority: MCL 380.11a

Date adopted: May 9, 2022

Date revised: