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BASIC**

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The purpose of the school curriculum is to educate students toward the development of a world in which all human beings may live in dignity. The goals of student learning should include participation in making the decisions which affect their lives, based on open access to information.

Learning experiences should be designed to help students understand the processes and causes of change through the careful analysis of all available data. It is important that learning experiences equip the learner with the ability to participate effectively in the process of change. This approach should foster the development of a value system guided by laws which accord human dignity to all persons and produce empathy with and compassion for other humans of diverse cultures, both in their own countries and in other parts of the world.

Human and cultural differences should be studied and appreciated as varieties of the total human experience. Students must be helped to understand themselves and others and permitted to discuss and reflect upon the nature of self and of others. Controversy, conflict and serious problems of society are as much a part of the student's in-school learning as they are of the student's out-of-school experiences.

Training for effective citizenship is accepted as one of the major purposes of the Camdenon Schools. The school program places great emphasis upon teaching about the American heritage, the rights and privileges we enjoy as citizens and the citizenship responsibilities that must be assumed in maintaining the American way of life. In training for effective citizenship, it is frequently necessary for pupils to study issues that are controversial.

In considering such issues it shall be the pupil's privilege:

- a. to study a controversial issue which has political, economic, legal, or social significance and concerning which the student should (at his or her level) begin to have an opinion;
- b. to have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community;
- c. to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere of freedom from bias and prejudice;
- d. to form and express his or her own opinions, based on his or her research, and presented in such ways as not to offend the dignity of others or to jeopardize the well-being of the school.

The approach of the teacher must be impartial and objective. The teacher should use the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of certain issues for consideration as a part of the curriculum:

- a. the treatment of the issue in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity and competence of the students;
- b. there should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue can be obtained;
- c. the consideration of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for satisfactory study by the class but sufficient to cover the issue adequately;
- d. the issue should be current, significant, real and important to the students, teacher and subject matter. 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, media, or various governmental agencies.

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

It is the teacher's responsibility to bring out the facts concerning controversial questions. The teacher has the right to express his or her opinions, but in so doing it is important that the students understand that it is the teacher's own opinion and is not to be accepted by them as an authoritative answer.

The principal and department chairman bear a major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the curriculum, including working with the teacher in the selection of materials and methods of instruction. They must be continuously aware of what is being taught in the classroom. A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with the principal and/or department chairman as to the appropriateness of doing so.

It is recognized that citizens of the community have a right to protest to the school administration when convinced that unfair and prejudiced presentations are being made by any teacher. In considering such protests, the school administration should provide for a hearing if in its judgment such a procedure is required. Teachers of subjects involving controversial issues should be assured of the school administration's support, if it is found that such teachers have been subjected to unfair criticism or partisan pressures from individuals or groups.

Note: The reader is encouraged to check the index located at the beginning of this section for other pertinent policies and to review administrative procedures and/or forms for related information.

Adopted: 08/08/1994

Camdenton R-III School District, Camdenton, Missouri