

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The mission of the Colby school district, in part, is to prepare young people to be lifelong learners, caring individuals and responsible citizens. In order to fully realize that mission, it may be necessary for students to study issues that are controversial in nature. Free discussion of such issues is vital to students' learning, critical thinking development, and understanding of the American democratic system as it pertains to academic freedom.

An issue can be defined as controversial when opposing views, thoughts or opinions are expressed, based on an individual's personal interests, beliefs, core values and/or group affiliations.

Academic freedom is essential to the fulfillment of the purposes of the district. Educators shall be protected from censorship or restraint that unreasonably interferes with their obligation to expose students to those controversial issues that are relevant to the subject matter being studied. The end goal is to aid students in formulating and expressing their own views on such issues.

The educator's responsibility is to present topics/issues in an objective, well-informed manner. The district recognizes that any educator has the right to hold his/her own opinions on an issue and to express those opinions. The educator also has the responsibility to inform students that such expression is solely a personal opinion and not a statement of fact.

The following should serve as guidelines for handling controversial issues:

1. The issue being one which is suitable for the maturity level and backgrounds of students.
2. The issue being one which is important and likely to be of continuing significance.
3. The issue being one for which adequate human and/or material resources are available.
4. The issue being one which is relevant in terms of predesignated course content.
5. Administrative and staff procedures as provided in the district handbook and policy.

The teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom is expected to consult with the building principal or, in the case of extracurricular, with the activities director. Similarly, they may consult with the teacher about these issues. If the teacher and principal or activities director are unable to agree, the issue may be referred to the district administrator or his/her designee for action. It is the responsibility of the teacher or advisor to get authorization from the building principal when a nonteaching or nonstudent speaker(s) is going to discuss a controversial issue or when a topic of uncertain propriety is going to be discussed.

LEGAL REFERENCE: Sections 115.28(31) Wisconsin Statutes
118.01
118.019
121.02(1)(h)

Pi 8, Wisconsin Administrative Code 41 20 U.S.C. 1232 h