

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES POLICY

A controversial issue is defined as an issue which is of political, community or personal concern, and which may have opposing viewpoints that is dealt with as part of the Raymond educational program.

American academic tradition stresses the free contest of ideas as a vital element both in the development of curriculum and in classroom teaching. Recognizing that the consideration of controversial issues has a legitimate place in the public school curriculum, it is the policy of the Raymond School District that the following principles be applied:

- All discussion of a controversial issue shall be conducted in an atmosphere of respect and appreciation of all sides of the issue. Educators must be fully aware of their responsibility to allow all viewpoints to be presented.
- Students shall have the right to form and express opinions on controversial issues without risk of repercussion from the teacher or the school.
- The handling of a controversial issue in school should be free from the assumption that there is only one correct opinion. Ideas should emerge from discussion and not from authoritative instruction. Indoctrination is not the purpose; rather, the purpose is to have students see as fully as possible many sides of the question, and begin to develop their own techniques for the consideration of controversial issues.
- A controversial issue is to be handled in an appropriate setting by an educator prepared for the responsibility and shall be based on the maturity and needs of the students. In making the decision as to whether a controversial issue shall become a matter for study, the educator shall ensure that the controversial subject to be discussed belongs within the framework of the curriculum to be covered, that the subject is significant as well as meaningful for the students, and that through the discussion, students will have the opportunity to grow.
- Parents have the option of limiting their child's participation, in part or in whole, in any planned discussion or course of a controversial nature. However, the wishes of one child's parents to restrict his/her participation in a class discussion will not infringe on another parent's rights to permit his/her child to participate. It will be the responsibility of the student, with prior written consent of the parent, to properly absent himself/herself from a particular school discussion. Such students will report to the office for an alternative assignment. Parents may have the opportunity to review materials utilized as part of the curriculum.
- In discussing controversial issues, the educator shall employ the same methods in handling controversial issues as characterize the best teaching at any time, such as:
 - The educator, in selecting both the content and the method of instruction, shall be mindful of the maturity level of the students.
 - The educator shall handle the classroom presentation in ways which will ensure a wide range of information and interpretation for the students' consideration and shall strive to present a balance among many points of view.
 - The educator shall not use the classroom as a personal forum. He/she shall not employ

the techniques of the demagogue or the propagandist for attention, for control, or simply for color. The educator has the right to identify and express his/her own point of view in the classroom as long as he/she indicates clearly that it is his/her own. Educators shall be constantly mindful of their position of considerable influence in the school setting. In light of this, restraint and careful judgment must be exercised in stating personal opinions to which students might ascribe more weight than is intended, that might distort or destroy the objectivity of their viewpoint, or that might be interpreted as prejudiced, slanderous or self-serving.

- The educator shall emphasize keeping an open mind, basing one's judgment on known facts, looking closely at facts to evaluate them in terms of the subject under discussion, and being ready to change one's opinion should new facts come into light. The emphasis shall always be on the method of forming an opinion as much as on the opinion formed.

In addition to the planned discussion of controversial issues, from time to time an issue arises unexpectedly. In such cases the educators have the responsibility of discerning its controversial nature and handling it in accordance with this policy.

Cross Reference: IJJ - Instructional and Library-Media Materials Selection

Adopted: April 3, 1990
Revised: March 7, 2007