

**Burlington School District
G 17: CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

Former Policy INB

Purpose

The purpose of the Burlington Public School Policy on Controversial or Sensitive Issues and Material Selection is to guide professional personnel and to inform the public of the principles that guide professional personnel in the selection of subjects, issues, materials, and media used to instruct students.

A policy does not replace the judgment of professional personnel, but stating goals and indicating boundaries will assist them in choosing appropriately.

Introduction

Helping students to become concerned, well-educated, responsible, and decision-making citizens is accepted as a major purpose of the Burlington School District. To achieve this purpose it is frequently necessary, often imperative, that students investigate in an intelligent manner, issues that may be controversial and sensitive. We acknowledge that respect for various points of view on all issues and subjects is an integral part of the academic attitude. It is the responsibility of parents to learn about the schools' educational program. Parents are encouraged to notify the schools of issues and subjects to which they are sensitive. Likewise, when a staff member is planning to present a topic or issue which he or she considers to be controversial or sensitive, parents should be notified in advance.

Student Rights

In considering such issues, then, the Burlington Public Schools shall recognize the student's right and responsibility –

- a. To study any problem or issue which has personal, political, economic, ethical, moral or social significance.
- b. To have free access to various sides of any controversial issue.
- c. To study under competent instructors in an atmosphere of freedom from bias and prejudice.
- d. To form and express the student's own opinions.

Student and Teacher Responsibilities

1. The approach of the student and teacher to controversial and sensitive issues must be

impartial and objective. Each has the right to express an opinion, but it is important that each understands that it is his/her own opinion and is not to be accepted by the group as an authoritative answer.

Controversial Issues

2. Teachers 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 subject in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.
 - b. There will be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to various sides of any subject can be obtained. Special care should be taken to provide a balance when special interest resources from the community are used.
 - c. The consideration of the subject should require as much time as is needed for satisfactory study.
3. The student and teacher should keep in mind that the classroom is a learning forum and not a committee for producing resolutions or dogmatic pronouncements. The class should feel no responsibility for reaching any agreement.
4. Teachers who are in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with their department head and/or principal as to the appropriateness of doing so.

Selection of Materials

Definitions: 1) The words, texts, books, materials, media, library materials, or other synonyms as they may occur in the policy have the widest possible meaning. Hence, it is implicit in this policy that every form of permanent materials is to be included whether printed or in manuscript, bound or unbound, photographed, or otherwise reproduced. Also included are audio and video tapes, discs, and films and pictures in the form of photographs, paintings, drawings, etchings, etc. 2) Selection refers to the decision that must be made either to add a given item to the collection, or to retain one already in it. It does not refer to reader guidance.

Responsibility for Selecting Materials: Professionals will work cooperatively with their appropriate staff members and administrator to interpret and guide the application of the policy in making materials selections; however, responsibility for material selection lies with the professional teacher, subject to the approval of appropriate administrators.

Learning Centers/Libraries

Objectives: Learning Centers and libraries have as their major goals in materials selection: a) the advancement of knowledge; b) the education and enlightenment of the students and adults in the school community; c) the provision of recreational reading. Basic to the policy is the School Library Bill of Rights as approved by the American Association of School Librarians Board of Directors, Atlantic City, 1969. It says:

"The American Association of School Librarians reaffirms its belief in the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association. Media personnel are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens. To this end, the American Association of School Librarians asserts that the responsibility of the school library media center is:

- "To provide a comprehensive collection of instructional materials selected in compliance with basic written selection principles and to provide maximum accessibility to these materials.
- To provide materials that will support the curriculum, taking into consideration the individual's needs and varied interests, abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and maturity levels of the students served.
- To provide materials for teachers and students that will encourage growth in knowledge and that will develop literacy, cultural and aesthetic appreciation, and ethical standards.
- To provide materials which reflect the ideas and beliefs of religious, social, political, historical, and ethnic groups and their contribution to the American and World heritage and culture, thereby enabling students to develop an intellectual integrity in forming judgments.
- To provide a written statement approved by the local Boards of Education of procedures for meeting the challenge of censorship of materials in school library media centers.
- To provide qualified professional personnel to serve teachers and students."

Public Served: First emphasis will be placed upon materials for the student body, the teaching and administrative staff; secondly, upon the total school staff, student-teachers and other instructional uses and personnel involved beyond the regular school day; thirdly, upon making available to the wider community such resources not otherwise easily available to them insofar as this does not place an undue burden upon the school.

Selection Policy: Selection will not be made on the basis of any anticipated approval or disapproval, but solely on the merits of the work in relation to the collection, correlation with the curriculum, and interests of the students and teachers. Materials will not be marked to show approval or disapproval of the contents, and no catalogued book or other medium will be sequestered except to protect it from harm.

Gifts: The library accepts gifts but reserves the right to evaluate and dispose of them in accordance with the above criteria. Gifts which do not accord with the resource center objectives and policies may be refused. Unsolicited materials of a biased nature may be retained at the discretion of the librarian or learning center coordinator.

Controversial Issues

An individual or group objecting to the presence or use of a particular instructional material(s) in a school, or to the discussion or teaching of a particular topic or issue, should notify the classroom teacher, librarian, or learning center coordinator involved, who shall attempt to accommodate the wishes of that individual or group in a fashion consistent with the policies set forth herein. The administration shall establish an appropriate and reasonable appeal procedure.

Legal Reference: T 16 VSA 7563 (1) [Powers of school boards]
T 16 VSA 7906 (6) [Courses of study]

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