**HANCOCK CENTRAL SCHOOL 4810**

 **TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

As a natural part of preparation for assuming an adult role in society, matters of a controversial nature will arise and may be dealt with as part of the student’s learning experience.

Training for effective citizenship is accepted as one of the major purposes of the schools of the district. The instructional program developed to achieve this purpose properly places great emphasis upon teaching about our American heritage, the rights and privileges we enjoy as citizens and the citizenship responsibilities that must be assumed in maintaining our American culture. In training for effective citizenship, it is frequently necessary for students to study issues that are controversial.

The Board of Education recognizes that controversial issues deal with matters about which there are varied levels of opposing views, biases, emotions and/or conflict. Therefore, it is essential that the classroom teacher have guidelines in order to prepare and execute lessons that will be as objective as possible while considering the nature of the subject matter. It is important that students and staff recognize the following responsibilities:

1. In the classroom, matters of a controversial nature shall be handled as they arise in the normal course of instruction and not introduced for their own sake. Such issues shall be neither sought nor avoided.
2. The study of controversial issues is objective and scholarly with a minimal emphasis on opinion. The teacher shall approach controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner. When presenting various positions on a controversial issue, the teacher shall take care to balance major views and to assure that as many sides of the issues as possible are presented in a fair manner, with no position being espoused by the teacher as the only one acceptable.
3. When materials dealing with controversial topics are to be used, assigned or recommended, such materials must not adversely affect the attainment of the district’s instructional goals or result in substantial disruption of the normal operation of the classroom.
4. Prior to presenting materials on such an issue, the classroom teacher shall present the materials to the Department Chairperson for approval. The Chairperson will review the materials pursuant to the guidelines above.
*5.* Political topics and/or political speakers will be offered in such a way that students will be presented with balanced aspects of the topic under consideration, in order to provide the students with the means to arrive at a considered opinion. Religious topics or religion related topics are considered in the spirit as well as the letter of the separation of church and state principle. Such topics will receive an academic treatment in class.
6. Speakers who are recognized experts in various fields of educational significance may be invited to address groups of students within the area of their expertise. All invitations to outside speakers will be issued by the professional staff with prior approval of the Superintendent of Schools.

In the study of controversial issues in our schools, the student has certain rights to be recognized:

1. the right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic or social significance and concerning which, at the student’s level of maturity, he/she should begin to have an opinion;

2. the right to have free access to all relevant information;
3. the right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias, prejudice and external pressures; and
4. the right to form and express his/her own opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing his/her relation with his/her teacher or the school.
The criteria for the determination of the appropriateness of the controversial issue should include:
1. the scope of the issue, as well as the depth of the factual material involved, must not surpass the maturity level of the students;
2. the proper professional judgment should be exercised with regard to the use of class time in discussing a controversial issue. The relevance and immediacy of the topic for the students must be considered, as well as the applicability within the curriculum being studied; and
3. the public school classroom will not be used as a platform for indoctrination about personal or any other beliefs regarding political, religious or social issues.

Ref: Education Law §414
*Hazelwood v Kuhlmeier,* 484 US 260 (1988)
*Tinker v Des Moines Independent Community School District,* 393 US *503*(1969)
*Board of Ed., Malverne UFSD v. Morgan,* 3020-a panel decision; Howard
C. Edelman, Esq., chairman (Feb. 2, 1990)
*Matter of Morgan,* 29 EDR 363 (1990)
*Malverne v. Sobol* (RJI # 0l-90-ST2690) Sup. Ct., Albany County, G.
Cobb, J.S.C., 4/1/91

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