

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The Board of Education of the Berlin Central School District recognizes that students must be prepared to give intelligent consideration to matters of public controversy if they are to become responsible adults participating fully in society. Matters of controversy should therefore be allowed to arise for consideration in students' formal education, and to be dealt with as part of their Berlin Central Schools learning experience.

The Board further recognizes that such matters are controversial because there are opposing and often deeply-held views on these topics, public discussion of which consequently generates emotion and creates conflict. The Board deems it essential, therefore, that classroom teachers have clear guidelines for preparing and conducting lessons on controversial topics that will help to make their classroom presentations and discussions as objective and scholarly as possible. As a consequence, the Board states the following conditions and expectations, which should be understood by both students and staff:

1. Matters of a controversial nature shall be handled in the classroom as they arise in the normal course of instruction; they shall not be introduced for their own sake. Treatment of such issues shall neither be sought nor avoided.
2. When presenting the various positions on a controversial issue, the teacher shall take care to balance major views, and to assure that as many sides of the issue as practicable are presented fairly, with the teacher espousing no position as the only one that is acceptable.
3. When materials dealing with controversial issues are to be used, assigned, or recommended, such materials must:
 - a. balance major views and provide as many sides of the issue as possible in a fair manner, with no position presented as the only one that is acceptable;
 - b. be appropriate to the maturity level of the students; and
 - c. neither adversely affect attainment of the district's instructional goals nor substantially disrupt the classroom's normal operation.

Prior to presenting materials on a controversial issue to students, the classroom teacher shall present the materials to the Principal for prior approval. The Principal shall review the materials for their suitability according to the guidelines stated above.

4. No guest speaker may address students unless the Principal grants prior approval for the address. The Principal must be informed of the scheduling of all guest speakers not less than three (3) school days prior to the speaker's anticipated presentation.

References

Education Law Sec. 414

Hazelwood v. Kuhlheimer, 484 US 260 (1988)

Tinker v. DesMoines Independent Community School Dist., 393 US 503 (1969)