

I. Policy Statement

The Board of Education recognizes the role of public education in preparing students for effective citizenship. Consequently, the instructional program developed to achieve this purpose must appropriately emphasize cultural heritage, critical thinking, and the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of living in a pluralistic society. The Board also recognizes that as students prepare for active engagement in participatory democracy, they often encounter issues that may be considered controversial. The Board of Education encourages the examination of controversial issues related to Board approved curricula in an impartial and objective manner. The examination of controversial issues should occur in inclusive and supportive learning environments that encourage respect for multiple perspectives. The Board also encourages community stakeholders, students, school system employees, parents, service providers, and each member of the community to support the teaching of controversial issues in the classroom in order to promote the development of civic efficacy, student engagement, and critical thinking among our students.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the teaching of controversial issues.

III. Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. Citizenship – Having the right to participate in and to be represented in politics and for the purpose of this document refers to both global and national politics.
- B. Controversial Issues – Significant academic, social, political, and ideological matters about which there exists opposing viewpoints and/or multiple perspectives.
- C. Curriculum – The prescribed elements of programs and courses which state clearly and specifically what students are to know and be able to do, how well they will be able to do it, how they will meet the learning objectives and by what means they will be assessed. Sensitive and controversial issue topics are components of the curriculum.
- D. Objective – Not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.

- E. Participatory Democracy – A process within which citizens either make decisions on policy and/or elect representatives in order to make laws and decisions on policy and implement those decisions.
- F. Perspectives – A point of view; a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something.
- G. Sensitive Issues – A resolved historical fact such as the Holocaust and slavery that must be addressed in a manner that supports a safe learning environment for students.
- H. Third Party – Parents, mentors, volunteers, vendors, contractors, and others with whom students or employees interact during school or school-related activities.

IV. Standards

- A. A controversial issue may be addressed in the classroom when the following conditions are met:
 - 1. The issue has political, economic, cultural, or social significance and is presented within curricular guidelines.
 - 2. Teachers have communicated to students how to practice civil discourse.
 - 3. Students are provided access to relevant and credible information pertaining to the issue under study.
 - 4. Students are able to form and express their own opinions on the issue without jeopardizing their relationships with teachers or the school.
- B. Controversial issues must be presented as follows:
 - 1. In an age appropriate manner.
 - 2. With a goal of encouraging discussion and building mutual understanding of the topic.
 - 3. With access to and respect for multiple perspectives and sources that are founded in relevant and credible information.
 - 4. In a learning environment that is safe, supportive, inclusive, and focused on an academic examination of the issue.
 - 5. In alignment with the school system's curriculum, mission, and vision.
- C. A sensitive issue may be related to a controversial issue or may lead to a discussion about a controversial issue. Therefore, sensitive issues should be addressed in accordance with Section IV.B.5. of this policy and Policy 8000 Curriculum.
- D. The use of resource speakers in teaching controversial issues is permitted in accordance with Policy 8060 Resource Speakers.

- E. Teachers will teach controversial issues in an objective and impartial manner. Teachers who have concerns about presenting a controversial issue will seek assistance from a supervisor about methods for facilitating a discussion.
- F. School-based procedures will be developed for approving controversial issues to be considered in the classroom.

V. Responsibilities

- A. The Superintendent/designee will ensure that students, parents, employees, and third parties are notified of the provisions of this policy annually.
- B. Teachers will present information in an objective manner, ensure multiple perspectives are represented, model citizenship and maintain adherence to related HCPSS policies as referenced in Section VII.B. of this policy.
- C. School-based administrators will develop and implement school-based procedures for approving controversial issues to be considered in the classroom.
- D. The Division of Academics, particularly those with curricular responsibilities, will provide assistance, advice, and training with regard to the teaching of controversial issues.

VI. Delegation of Authority

The Superintendent is authorized to develop procedures for the implementation of this policy.

VII. References

- A. Legal
 - Code of Maryland Regulations, 13A.04.04 Religious Education
 - Code of Maryland Regulations, 13A.04.0 Program in Social Studies
 - Code of Maryland Regulations, 13A.04.09 Program in Science
 - Code of Maryland Regulations, 13A.04.14 Program in English Language Arts
 - Code of Maryland Regulations, 13A.04.18 Program in Comprehensive Health Education
- B. Other Board Policies
 - Policy 1000 Civility
 - Policy 1010 Anti-Discrimination
 - Policy 1040 Safe and Supportive Schools
 - Policy 1060 Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, or Intimidation
 - Policy 8000 Curriculum
 - Policy 8040 Selection of Instructional Materials
 - Policy 8060 Resource Speakers
 - Policy 8070 Religion and Religious Materials

C. Relevant Data Sources

D. Other

VIII. History

ADOPTED: February 1, 1972

REVIEWED: July 1, 2011

MODIFIED:

REVISED: March 8, 1990

April 28, 2005

February 13, 2020

EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2020

TEACHING OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Effective: July 1, 2020

- I. The Division of Academics, working with school-based administrators and in accordance with curricular guidelines, bears the primary responsibility for the development of procedures and training for the teaching of controversial issues.
 - A. Assistance and guidance from the Division of Academics will be available to school-based administrators and teachers concerning topics related to the teaching of controversial issues such as, mitigating biases and facilitating discussions that include a variety of perspectives.
 - B. Teachers will ensure that their instruction is in accordance with the procedures and training referenced in Section I. above and maintains adherence to related Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) policies as referenced in Section VII.B. of this policy.
- II. Teachers will use the following Board of Education approved criteria for determining the appropriateness of issues for consideration as a part of the curriculum:
 - A. The treatment of the issue in question will be within range, knowledge, maturity, and civic discourse skills of the students.
 - B. Credible and relevant information that represents multiple and diverse perspectives which address the complex aspects of an issue will be provided to students.
 - C. The issue should be significant and related to written curriculum and should not adversely impact instruction or pacing.
 - D. A teacher who has concerns about discussing a controversial issue-with students should confer with his/her administration.
- III. In order to support the development of civic interest and efficacy, student engagement, and the critical thinking among HCPSS students, community stakeholders are encouraged to:
 - A. Support the goal of the HCPSS to create engaged participants in democracy by teaching students to address controversial issues with inquiry and civility.
 - B. Work in partnership with HCPSS educators in the appropriate discussion of controversial issues.

- C. Participate in students' education experiences by continuing to have civil and thoughtful conversations that reflect multiple perspectives.

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