

Administrative Procedures for Policy 6144: Controversial Issues

Controversial Issues

As free objective discussion of controversial issues is the heart of the free process of representative government, freedom of speech and free access to information is among our most cherished traditions. It is the responsibility of the teachers to uphold these traditions, but policy on controversial issues should be defined in terms of the rights of pupils rather than in terms of the right of teachers. With regard to controversial issues in the public schools, the pupil has four rights to be recognized.

1. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic or social significance and concerning which (at hi/hers level) he/she should begin to have an opinion.
2. The right to have access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
3. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
4. The right to form and express his/her own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his/her relations with his/her teacher or the school.

To guarantee these rights of the pupil, it is therefore the duty of the teacher to see that the area of controversial issues is objective and scholarly, with a minimum emphasis on opinion. The teacher must approach controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner and must refrain from using his/her classroom privileges and prestige to promote a partisan or factional point of view.

Dramatic and Musical Productions

In view of the fact that any play or musical show produced by the schools is interpreted by the community as being approved or sanctioned by the school, it is important in selecting a production, or in choosing acts for a talent show, that good judgment is followed.

Cozad School's dramatic and musical productions are not meant to compete with commercial stage, screen and television shows for the entertainment dollar. Students, teachers, parents, and friends, who are close to school affairs, feel obliged to support school activities. The primary purpose of the school production is to provide opportunities to develop talent among the students. It is also the goal of any stage production to entertain the audience. With these goals in mind, the following points should be used as a guide:

1. Profanity or Swearing—objectionable language should not be used unless it is important in showing the development of the character or is necessary to the understanding of the meaning of the play.
2. Allusions to sex—Allusions or references to sex which seem to convey the approval of promiscuity, perversion, or illicit relations in any sense, should not be included in the play or show. Passionate love scenes or prolonged kissing are also not desirable in a school production.

3. Costumes and Dress—Proper costuming and dress for the parts being played is expected. Nudity shall not be permitted in any performance.
4. Religion—Reference to religion, to any particular religious sect, to divinity of deity should not be made if used disparagingly. Comments, situations, or stage business which would compare, contrast, or weigh in religious faction against another, should be eliminated unless they are used in a true historical setting of the past or show present day real life situations.

In general, it would appear that the school production would have the effect on the players and audience of being morally uplifting. To live our ideals is certainly one of the functions of the total educational program. The school play or musical can, and should make its contribution to this accomplishment.

The final decision for controversial dramatic and musical productions shall rest with the Cozad Board of Education. Such decision shall include discussion and consultation with school officials and anyone else the board may wish to involve.

Selection of Printed Instructional Materials

The Cozad Board of Education, which is responsible for all book and instructional material purchases for the school district, recognizes the student's need for access to many different types of books and materials. The board also recognizes the right of teachers and administrators to select books and other materials in accord with current trends in education and to make them available in the schools. It is, therefore, the policy of this district to require the materials selected for our school to be in accordance with the following procedures:

1. Selection of Books and Other Printed Materials
 - a. Books and other printed matter shall be selected for values of interest and enlightenment of all students in the schools. A book shall not be excluded because of the race, nationality, political, or religious views of the writer, or of its style and language, except in matters of undue vulgarity and obscenity.
 - b. Every effort will be made to provide materials that present all points of view concerning the problems and issues of our times, international, national, and local. Books or other reading materials of sound factual authority shall not be prescribed or removed from library shelves or classrooms because of partisan doctrinal or disapproval.
 - c. Censorship of books shall be challenged in order to maintain the school's responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
2. Censorship of Books and Other Printed Materials
 - a. The final decision for controversial reading matter shall rest with the Cozad Board of Education after careful examination and discussion of the book and reading material. Such examination and discussion shall include consultation with school officials and anyone else the board may wish to involve.
 - b. No parent or group of parents shall have the right to determine the reading matter for students other than their own children.
 - c. The board recognizes the right of an individual parent to request that his child not have to read a given book. A written request stating the parent's objection shall be made to the appropriate building principal.

- d. Any parent or guardian who wishes to request reconsideration of the use of any book or printed materials in the school, must make such a request in writing on forms provided by the school and available from building principals. The statement must be signed and identified so that a reply may be given. Parents must use the “Cozad Community Schools’ Complaint Procedures”.
- e. A committee, appointed by the superintendent, consisting of the principal, two teachers, and one librarian: and which may include parents, patrons, and students shall review the questioned material and judge whether it conforms to the previously stated principles and submit its report in writing to the superintendent.
- f. If the matter cannot be resolved at the committee level, then the written complaint along with the committee’s evaluation shall be forwarded to the superintendent. If the disposition is not resolved at that level, it shall then be referred to the Cozad Board of Education. The concerned parties shall be notified of the final disposition in writing.

Complaints Concerning Library Materials

The Cozad Board of Education, as established through policy, recognizes procedures for the selection of library books and materials to be placed in the media centers. The Board of Education further recognizes the rights of students to have access to a variety of materials. The Board of Education will strongly challenge censorship of books that have been selected according to prescribed standards.

If patrons of the school district have objections to materials purchased for the media centers of School District #11, they may make formal protests in the following manner:

1. Lodge a written complaint with the principal of the school stating what material is objectionable, why it is objectionable, and suggested solutions for dealing with the materials.
2. After meeting with the media personnel in charge of the center where the objectionable material is located, the principal shall answer the complaint in writing to the objector.
3. If the objector is not satisfied with the answer given by the principal, he/she may appeal his objection to the Superintendent of Schools.
4. If the Superintendent’s decision is unsatisfactory, the objector may request a hearing before the Cozad Board of Education at the next regular board meeting.
5. After hearing the objection, the Board of Education, within a reasonable length of time, shall render a decision which will be final

Complaints Concerning Visual Information Material

The Cozad Board of Education recognizes that much of education is a search for truth. In this search students will be exposed to varying philosophies. In order to present broad curricular material, some material might prove to be unacceptable to some individuals. Therefore, the Board of Education has adopted the following

Principles and procedures:

1. That the final decision for controversial instructional matter shall rest with the Board of Education after careful examination and discussion of the instructional matter with school officials, or with anyone else the board may wish to involve.
2. That no parent or group of parents has the right to determine the instructional matter for students other than their own children.

3. The board does, however, recognize the right of an individual parent to request that his child not be required to see a given film, provided a written request stating the parents' reason for objection, is made to the appropriate building principal.
4. Any parent who wishes to request reconsideration of the use of any learning material in the school must make such a request in writing in the form provided through building principals. The form is entitled "Cozad Community Schools' Complaint Procedures".

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