

# PROCEDURE WSD607

## WINOOSKI SCHOOL DISTRICT

### CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

1. The approach of the teacher to controversial topics must be impartial and objective.
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 issue in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity and competence of the students.
  - b) There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue could be obtained.
  - c) The consideration of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for satisfactory study of the class, but sufficient time should be provided to cover the issue adequately.
  - d) The issue should be current, significant, real, and important to the students and teacher. Significant issues are those, which, in general, concern considerable numbers of people, are related to basic principles, or at the moment are under consideration by the public, political bodies or the mass media.
3. In discussing controversial issues, the teacher should keep in mind that:
  - a) the classroom is a forum and not a committee for producing resolutions or dogmatic pronouncements.
  - b) the class should feel no responsibility for reaching any agreement or consensus.
  - c) the regular school curriculum should be enhanced and not disrupted by study of such issues.
4. It is the teacher's responsibility to bring out the facts concerning controversial questions. He/she has the right to express his/her opinion, but in doing so, it is important that the students understand that it is an opinion, and is not to be accepted by them as an authoritative answer.
5. The principal bears a major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the curriculum, including the selection of materials and methods of instruction. He/she must be continuously aware of what is being taught or presented in his/her school.
6. A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with his/her principal as to the appropriateness of doing so. If the principal and the teacher are unable to agree, and the teacher wishes to pursue the issue, it should be referred to the Superintendent.
7. A student, parent/guardian or other citizen of Winooski may challenge the inclusion of or presenting of specific issues and/or instructional materials as follows:
  - a) The complainant should first review the district's policy regarding controversial issues carefully scrutinizing the Statement and Application sections of the policy.

- b) After careful review, if the complainant still desires to protest the advisability of teaching or presenting said controversial issue of using said instructional material, he/she should file the attached Request for Review of Instructional Material and/or Teaching of a Controversial Issue form with the respective school principal. The complaint could involve the teaching of a specific issue, instructional(s), method of presentation, procedure(s) of discussion, speakers, etc.
  - c) Upon receipt of Request for Review form, the Principal shall meet with the teacher(s) involved, the complainant and other appropriate parties to determine if there is a solution to the issue. If the issue is resolved at the principal's level, the initial complaint form will be filed with the Superintendent's office appropriately recorded as resolved. In the case that the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution at the Principal's level, a form would be forwarded to the Superintendent's office.
  - d) The superintendent shall meet with the principal, the complainant and other appropriate parties to determine if there is a solution to the issue. When a complaint reaches the Superintendent's level, the Board shall be provided with a brief characterization of the issues and notice that a complaint is being processed. If no mutually agreeable solution is possible, the complainant may take the issue to the Board of School Trustees.
  - e) The Board of School Trustees will review the matter in open session providing all concerned parties a full hearing. After careful consideration, the Board will take whatever action it deems appropriate. The Board's decision shall be final.
8. Materials, presentations, procedures, speakers, etc., already in place when a Request for Review is filed shall remain in place while the review is being processed in accordance with this policy. Materials, presentations, procedures, etc. which are being newly introduced to the educational programs will not be utilized until the Request for Review process is completed.
9. When a request for Review is received by the Superintendent, he/she shall notify the Board members about the essence of the request. However, since the Board is the final arbitrator in such situations, the Board should not be given the full details about the review, or engage in a discussion of such a review until said issue comes before the Board as set forth in 7e) above.
10. School principals shall annually provide notification to all students and parents that this policy exists and how to file a Request for Review.

## WINOOSKI SCHOOL DISTRICT

### REQUEST FOR REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL AND/OR TEACHING OF A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

Request Initiated by: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Complainant Represents:

\_\_\_\_\_ Himself/Herself

\_\_\_\_\_ Organization Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

If this complaint is made on behalf of a student or a group of students, please identify the student(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. To what in the material, issue, method of presentation, etc. do you object (Please be specific – cite pages, incidents, remarks, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you feel might be the result of studying this issue, of this method of presentation, use of this material, etc? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. For what age group would you recommend this issue, method, or material? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is there anything good about this material, issue, method? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you aware of the opinions regarding this issue, material or method held by prominent social, educational, political, religious critics? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your general opinion of this material, issue, method? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What would you like your school to do about this issue?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do not assign it to my child

\_\_\_\_\_ Withdraw it from all students as well as my child

\_\_\_\_\_ Send it back to the appropriate parties for re-evaluation

8. In its place, what issue, method of equal social, political, religious, importance would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_