

## **TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

As reflected in the Missoula County Public Schools' Board Policy #2330 below, the district encourages and supports the concept of academic freedom, recognizing it as a necessary condition to aid in maintaining an environment conducive to learning and the free exchange of ideas and information. By the nature of the topic, controversial issues will arise in Social Studies.

### **Controversial Issues/Academic Freedom**

2330

The District shall offer courses of study, which will afford learning experiences appropriate to the level of student understanding. The instructional program shall respect the right of students to face issues, to have free access to information, to study under teachers in situations free from prejudice, and to form, hold, and express their own opinions without personal prejudice or discrimination.

Teachers shall guide discussions and procedures with thoroughness and objectivity to acquaint students with the need to recognize opposing viewpoints, importance of fact, value of good judgment, and the virtue of respect for conflicting opinions.

The Board encourages and supports the concept of academic freedom, recognizing it as a necessary condition to aid in maintaining an environment conducive to learning and the free exchange of ideas and information.

In the study or discussion of controversial issues or materials, however, the Board directs the teaching staff to take into account the following criteria:

- The issue involved should pertain to the subject being taught and the course objectives.
- The nature of the instruction and the teaching methods used should be adapted to the maturity level of the students.
- Differing points of view should be considered.
- Opportunity should be provided for the development of critical thinking, the ability to detect propaganda and the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion.
- The legitimacy of honest differences of opinion among individuals looking at the same evidence should be established.
- One's right to change his/her opinion should be respected.
- Pupils should be encouraged to withhold judgment until thorough study has been completed.
- Emphasis should be placed on the right and necessity of forming independent judgments based on reasoning and the full use of all available information.
- Teachers must approach controversial issues in an impartial and unprejudiced manner and must refrain from using their classroom position to promote their own or any partisan point of view.

Legal Reference: Article X, Sec. 8, Montana Constitution - School district trustees § 20-3-324(16) and (17), MCA  
Powers and duties Policy History: Adopted on: January 14, 2003