

Downey Unified School District

INSTRUCTION

CURRICULUM - INSTRUCTION ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

AR 3122.2

It shall be the policy of the Downey Unified School District to foster the study of vital present-day public problems in the classroom. This policy is in keeping with our point of view toward meeting our pupils' needs for effective living in American democracy.

The study of current problems is always based on the foundation of positive instruction toward a belief in the ideals and processes of American democracy and on the understanding of totalitarian ideals and methods which are contrary to American democracy. Proposed solutions of public problems are tested in the light of democratic procedures: concern for the worth of the individual and for the common welfare; recognition of fair play; and emphasis on peaceful, constitutional methods of progress.

Furthermore, vital problems are discussed and studied in terms suited to the degree of maturity of the learners and their capacity for understanding concepts and values. Instruction for developing objective judgment begins at the elementary level, but many issues are not included in the elementary curriculum because they cannot be understood at that level. It is the policy of the District to provide teachers with approved courses of study and authorized materials for instruction which serve as guides to the selection of problems for discussion at appropriate grade levels.

It shall be the policy of the District to provide pupils with an opportunity to study current issues in an atmosphere as free as practicable from partisanship or emotional approach. We recognize the professional responsibility of teachers to distinguish between teaching and advocacy, to refrain from using classroom prestige to promote partisan or secretarian viewpoints. Rather, the teacher keeps him/herself well informed, aids pupils in the search for facts, and helps them to learn to think clearly in arriving at tentative conclusions about these facts.

We have a responsibility to teach pupils to be concerned about finding possible answers to problems pertaining to their respective age levels; to teach them to be willing to take a stand on questions which citizens must decide and yet to maintain an attitude of open-mindedness toward new facts which may lead to new conclusions. We teach our pupils to respect the rights of others to be different in their opinions. We believe that accurate information and effective thinking will discourage the uncritical acceptance of unsound proposals for solving public problems, and will focus the experience of history upon current problems.

Democracy is not controversial in America. We believe in it. Communism and Fascism are not controversial in America. We do not believe in them.

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CURRICULUM - INSTRUCTION ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES - continued

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Controversial issues arise from the conflicts in the cherished interests, beliefs, or affiliations of large groups of our citizens. Controversial issues are important proposals or policies concerning which our citizens hold different points of view. Controversial issues are those on which conflicting views are held by political parties, by management and labor, by city and county, and by other large groups of our people who disagree on the proposed solutions to important problems.

The American heritage and our established traditions are not controversial. Most of the school curriculum of the District is composed of established truths and accepted values, but it also includes many controversial issues. Gradual social change is inevitable, and the public schools include the study of some important unsolved problems which involve controversial issues. These are appropriately studied insofar as the maturity of the pupils and the means available permit. Only through the study of such issues (political, economic, or social) does youth develop certain abilities needed for citizenship in our democracy.

The Downey schools do not teach controversial issues, but rather provide opportunities for their study. The schools teach American heritage (our established truths and accepted values) and, in doing this, provide opportunities for pupils to study other forms of government...in order to teach pupils the values of American democracy. On all grade levels the schools provide opportunities for pupils, according to their maturity, to analyze current problems, gather and organize pertinent facts, discriminate between fact and opinion, detect propaganda, identify prejudice, draw intelligent conclusions, respect the opinions of others, and accept the principles of majority rule and the rights of minorities.

However, it is recommended that the discussion of highly controversial issues of a local nature be deferred until sufficient facts and perspective can be secured to base discussion upon reason rather than upon undue emotion.

Approved: 11/20/61