

Chesterfield County Public Schools Curriculum and Instructional Guidelines for Culturally Diverse Topics and Issues

Background

Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) has established a comprehensive curriculum to guide K-12 instruction. This curriculum is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning and the Virginia Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework for core courses. The Virginia Department of Education seeks input from K-12 and college educators as well as community members in the development of the Standards of Learning. In addition, public input is sought during the Standards of Learning approval process through advertised public comment hearings and online public comment opportunities.

All Standards of Learning are revised on a seven-year cycle and the online public comment opportunities are offered during each revision cycle.

Upon adoption of revised Standards of Learning by the Virginia Board of Education, a textbook adoption process is initiated. During this process, K-12 educators review submitted textbooks for alignment with the adopted Standards. Also during the process, the textbooks being considered for adoption are placed at designated, publicized sites around the Commonwealth to permit an opportunity for public review and comment.

Upon completion of the textbook review process, the Virginia Department of Education recommends for adoption those books judged to be aligned to the established Standards of Learning. The Virginia Department of Education reviews the recommendations and any related public comment and determines which books will be placed on the adopted list.

School divisions, including Chesterfield County Public Schools, refer to the posted state approved textbook list when considering books for adoption for core courses.

Rationale for Guidelines

The Virginia Standards of Learning include topics that introduce content, concepts, and issues that may create differences of opinion among the population of Chesterfield County. This population is diverse in ethnicity, culture, national origin, race, viewpoints, and religious beliefs.

In a statement regarding how religion should be treated in public schools, the United States Secretary of Education in 2001 stated that “the First Amendment requires public school officials to be neutral in their treatment of religion, showing neither favoritism toward nor hostility against religious expression.” He further stated that, “[s]tudents may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school.” Chesterfield County Public School employees are to comply with the Secretary’s guidance, as stated above, when addressing religious topics.

Charge from the Chesterfield County Public School Board of Education

The following guidelines for teaching sensitive topics have been developed by the Division of Instruction at the formal request of the CCPS School Board on May 22, 2007. These guidelines are intended to ensure that Chesterfield County Public Schools' vision for the school system is anchored upon the understanding that our schools must be thriving, dynamic, and inspiring educational environments that produce self-directed learners. Self-directed learning occurs only when alternative views are explored and discussed. The CCPS School Board supports the unimpeded exploration of different perspectives of sensitive topics and encourages our students to explore and expand their knowledge of these topics through research and debate, developing students' creative and independent thinking skills.

Student expression of diversity in the classroom should be aligned with state and nationally approved standards and presented through constructive activities that may include, but are not limited to:

- Research
- Student portfolio
- Project
- Debate
- Dramatic production
- Presentation
- Essay
- Artistic representation
- Simulation

Sensitive or Controversial Topics

At no time shall a Chesterfield County Public School student be required to produce classroom products or participate in classroom activities on topics that are in opposition to their ethnicity, culture, national origin, race, viewpoints, or religious beliefs. If the student and parent deem the topic to be offensive or in opposition to their beliefs, an appropriate alternative assignment or activity shall be provided that has the same rigor and expectations.

Curriculum content should be presented in such a manner as to be sensitive to student diversity. While content of the curriculum is dictated by state standards, teachers must be sensitive to the manner in which certain topics and issues are introduced in instruction. In addition, teachers should evaluate the possible impact of an activity on all students. The following list provides examples of issues that, if not handled appropriately, may result in a student feeling offended or excluded from the educational process:

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| • Ethnicity | • Gender | • Cultural diversity |
| • Religion | • Family dynamics | • Ethics of medicine |
| • Sexually explicit art and literature | • Appropriateness of sources | • Violence in literature and course content |
| • Misuse or misinterpretation of statistical data | • Credibility of instructional resources and research sources | • Offensive vocabulary, mannerisms, behaviors in instructional resources |
| | • Historical perspectives/environmental/political perspectives | |

The Virginia Department of Education reviews current research and U.S. Supreme Court rulings when developing the established standards that may address the above areas. Avoiding these issues in the instructional process is not practical, but teachers must ensure the selection of resources and activities to support established curriculum is accurate, age appropriate and does not create an atmosphere in which any student feels excluded or uncomfortable. Teachers must also ensure that personal bias is not reflected in their selection or delivery of content and supporting activities or resources. Teachers should monitor and pre-approve student presentation and projects to ensure they do not introduce content that may create an atmosphere of exclusion for students.

Guidelines for Development of Lesson Plans

The following procedures should be followed when developing lessons around sensitive or controversial topics:

- Ensure all activities are correlated to the current, approved curriculum.
- Ensure planned activities are reviewed by the administration, a peer, or designated school review committee in compliance with county or school policy.
- Ensure parents receive adequate notice of the introduction of controversial or sensitive topics.
- Ensure parents are provided an opportunity to appropriately share concerns prior to the introduction of controversial or sensitive topics. When concerns are raised, conduct a dialogue with the parents to promote a resolution to the issue.
- Ensure alternate activities are provided if concerns cannot be adequately resolved.
- Ensure background knowledge necessary to participate in an activity is provided.
- Ensure thorough follow-up is provided to address misunderstandings or to allow for student reactions.

The appropriate subject area instructional specialist may provide clarification of this policy.

Guidelines for Development of Independent Research/Projects

- Ensure content of the assignment is correlated to the current, approved curriculum.
- Ensure students are provided with written instructions for the development of the assignment project. The instructions should include:
 - A due date (or dates if the project has multiple benchmarks)
 - Topics to be researched
 - A list of appropriate research sources or types of sources. For example: *Internet sources should be from recognized government agencies or institutes of higher learning. Internet URL s for these organizations will end in ".gov" or ".edu".*
- Ensure students are provided with a scoring rubric at the time the assignment is made to promote understanding of the expectations for successful product completion.

Guidelines for Use of Supplementary Materials in the Classroom

- Supplementary materials should be aligned with the established curriculum and be grade level appropriate.
- The teacher should review all supplementary material to ensure content and pictures are age level appropriate.

Guidelines for Administrative Responsibilities

- The Curriculum and Instructional Guidelines for Culturally Diverse Topics and Issues will become part of the Faculty Handbook, and administrators will review guidelines with faculty members at the beginning of every academic year. Principals will be required to submit annual verification of this review by all teachers and faculty to their respective director.
- Administrators should conduct classroom observations to ensure that all classroom instruction is aligned with the approved curriculum.

Guidelines for Teacher Responsibilities

- The teacher should implement the approved curriculum and guidelines for instruction as contained herein.
- The teacher should provide notice of the curriculum and assigned activities in a timely manner for any sensitive or controversial topics to allow for parental feedback.
- The teacher should consult with the principal or instructional specialist on any potentially sensitive or controversial topic not mentioned herein.