

Instruction

Controversial Issues

Students in our schools shall have the opportunity for free discussion of controversial issues.

Such free discussion requires that students have at least four rights:

1. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic or social significance and concerning which the student, at his/her level should begin to have an opinion
2. The right to have free 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 the student's relations with the teacher or the school.

The discussion and study of controversial issues shall be objective and scholarly and linked to existing curriculum with a minimum emphasis on opinion. The teacher shall approach controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner, and must refrain from using classroom privileges and prestige to promote a partisan point of view.

Instructional policy on controversial issues is here stated by the Board of Education in order to protect teachers and school administrators from unwarranted attack by pressure groups, and to insure youth a well-balanced preparation for American citizenship.

Selection of Controversial Issues

The following guidelines, while not all inclusive, should assist teachers in deciding whether or not a given controversial issue should be considered:

1. Is the controversial issue timely and is it significant? Some issues are quite transitory. They arise rather rapidly, create a great deal of excitement and almost as quickly disappear. The teacher should attempt to select those issues which have a bearing on long-range problems.
2. Is the controversial issue appropriate to the academic level and maturity of the students?
3. Does the student have access to materials which will provide significant bearing on the controversial issue being discussed?

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Controversial Issues (continued)

4. Can the issue be adequately considered in the time available? It is sometimes better not to raise questions that cannot be properly explored than to create a situation of hasty, ill-informed discussion. Superficial treatment of important questions usually defeats the purpose of introducing them.
5. Is the controversial issue being discussed related to the course of study?
6. Some issues do not have a proper place in the classroom that seeks to educate all children with public funds. The teacher should use sound judgment and tact in selecting those controversial topics and will accomplish the objectives of teaching them rather than defeating those objectives. For example, the following should be avoided:
 - a. The rationale or values of any religious faith
 - b. Subjects whose consideration would give serious offense to large segments of the community.
 - c. Subjects that will strongly divide a community and consideration of which may lead to misinterpretation and even partisan pressures. In cases of doubt, the teacher should seek guidance of more experienced colleagues, his/her immediate supervisor, or an administrator.
 - d. Young and immature minds should not be subjected to persuasive or vigorous argumentation or presentation by persons with a known and strong bias.
7. The teacher's responsibilities include the achievement of a scholarly competence, the teaching of controversy as controversy, opinion as opinion, to teach the truth, and to admit ignorance when the truth is not known.

In the study of controversial issues, indoctrination shall not be the purpose; rather, the purpose shall be to have the student see as fully as possible all sides of the question or issue.
8. The responsibility of maintaining and manifesting at all times a decent respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is paramount.

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Controversial Issues (continued)

(cf. 1220 - Citizens' Advisory Committees)

(of. 1312 - Public Complaints)

(cf. 4118.21 - Academic Freedom)

(cf. 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression)

(cf. 6161 - Equipment, Books, Materials: Provision/Selection)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

31-51q Liability of employer for discipline or discharge of employee on account of employee's exercise of certain constitutional rights.

Keyishian v. Board of Regents 395 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)

Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 9/9/81)

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HAMDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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