

Instruction

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

6144(a)

The Board of Education (Board) recognizes that the District's educational program may sometimes include instruction related to controversial issues that may provoke strong reactions based on personal values and beliefs, political philosophy, culture, religion, or other influences. Instruction concerning such topics shall be relevant to the adopted course of study and curricular goals and should be designed to develop students' critical thinking skills, ability to discriminate between fact and opinion, respect for others, and understanding and tolerance of diverse points of view.

American public education has fostered, and the Fairfield Public Schools support, a climate that allows students to recognize differences of opinion on important issues. Educators must deal with controversial issues in an open and fair manner. Learning to recognize and understand controversial issues is a basic skill, which all students in the Fairfield Public Schools should acquire. In studying controversial issues, there should be an opportunity for students to gather information about the issue, understand alternative viewpoints, and then, where appropriate, make personal judgments on the issue.

In order for students to develop these analytical skills, teachers in the Fairfield Public Schools shall have the opportunity to help students secure and evaluate information, learn the techniques of critical analysis, and make independent judgments. Students will have the opportunity, where appropriate, to present and support their conclusions before persons who have opposing points of view. Teachers will help students recognize the need for continuous and objective examination of these issues in light of changing conditions in society and as new evidence becomes available.

Definitions:

Controversial issues are defined as those problems, subjects, or questions about which there are major differences of opinion, for which there are no easy answers, and discussion of which generally creates strong feelings among people. These differences of opinion are based, in part, on the differences in values, which people bring to the evaluation of the facts of the issue.

Curriculum: The prescribed elements of programs and courses that state clearly and specifically what students are to know and be able to do. Sensitive and controversial issue topics are components of the curriculum.

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Guidelines

When providing instruction related to a controversial issue, the following guidelines shall apply:

1. The topic shall be suitable for the age and maturity of the students and according to the Board of Education's approved curriculum.
2. Instruction shall be presented in a balanced manner without bias or prejudice and without promoting any particular point of view.
3. In the classroom, teachers act on behalf of the District and are expected to follow the adopted curriculum. In leading or guiding class discussions about issues that may be controversial, a teacher may not advocate his/her personal opinion or viewpoint. The Superintendent or his/her designee may instruct teachers to refrain from sharing personal views in the classroom on controversial topics.
4. Students shall be assured of their right to form and express an opinion without jeopardizing their grades or being subject to discrimination, retaliation, or discipline, provided the viewpoint does not constitute harassment, threats, intimidation, or bullying or is otherwise unlawful.
5. Students shall be informed of conduct expected during such instruction and the importance of being courteous and respectful of the opinions of others.
6. Balanced factual information shall be provided to help students objectively analyze and evaluate the issue and draw their own conclusions.
7. The instruction shall not reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, religion, or any other basis prohibited by law.
8. The subject matter of the instruction shall not otherwise be prohibited by state or federal law.

When a guest speaker is invited to make a presentation related to a controversial issue, it must be aligned with the approved curriculum. The Superintendent or designee shall notify him/her and the staff of this policy and the expectations and goals regarding the instruction. If the guest speaker is presenting only one point of view on an issue, the teacher shall be responsible for ensuring that students also receive information on opposing viewpoints.

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When required by law, such as in regard to comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education, parents/guardians shall be notified prior to instruction that they may request in writing that their child be excused from the instruction. Students whose parents/guardians decline such instruction will be offered an alternative activity of similar educational value.

A student or parent/guardian with concerns regarding instruction about controversial issues may communicate directly with the teacher or principal.

Extracurriculars are exempted from this policy.

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 385 US 589,603 (1967)
Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 9/9/81)
Garcetti v. Ceballos, (2006) 547 U.S. 410
Johnson v. Poway Unified School District, (2011) 658 F.3d 954 (9th Cir.)
Mayer v. Monroe County Community School Corporation, (2007) 474 F.3d 477 (7th Cir.)

Adopted 8/27/2004

Revised and Adopted 2/10/2026

(cf. 1312 Public Complaints)

(cf. 6142.1 – Family Life and Sex Education – Family Life Exemption)

(cf. 6160 – Instructional Resources – Supplies and Equipment)

(cf. 6161 – Instructional Resources – Equipment, Books, & Materials – Textbooks & Workbooks)

(cf. 6162.51 – Student Surveys)