

### CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Controversial issues are those subjects in which there are significant differences of opinion based on differing values people bring to an issue; as a basic educational competency, students should develop abilities to deal with controversial issues.

Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life, and study and discussion of controversial issues is essential to citizenship education in a free society. Students can become better informed individuals through examining evidence, facts, and differing viewpoints; by exercising freedom of thought and moral choice; and through making responsible decisions. Perpetuation of the fundamental principles of American society requires opportunities for students to read, to gather information, to speak, to hear alternative viewpoints, and to reach honest judgments according to individual abilities.

Teachers shall help students identify and evaluate relevant information, learn the techniques of critical analysis, and make independent judgments. They must reinforce students rights to present and support personal conclusions with those who have opposing points of view. Teachers should also develop student interest in objective re-examination of long-standing issues, and of newly significant issues, and promote vigorous exchanges of ideas. Although teachers have the right to express personal viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to indoctrinate students with their personal views.

(cf. 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)

## Regional School District No. 7

### Administrative Regulations to Policy 6144 Controversial Issues

A controversial issue involves a problem about which different individuals and groups urge conflicting courses of action. It is an issue for which society has not found a universally accepted solution, and it is of sufficient significance that each proposed way of dealing with it is objectionable to some sector of the citizenry. The objection may result from a feeling that a cherished belief, an economic interest, or a basic principle is threatened.

The Regional School District No. 7 public schools, as an educational institution, and the individual classroom teacher have a responsibility to give the student:

- An opportunity to study controversial issues which have religious, political, economic or social significance about which students will begin to have an opinion.
- Access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
- Competent instruction balancing the various points of view in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- The right to form and express opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing relations with teachers or in the schools.

In fulfilling this responsibility the teacher shall make a deliberate effort to achieve balance within a reasonable period of time in the viewpoints and information to which students are exposed.

In selecting certain controversial issues to be included in the instructional program the staff shall use the following guidelines:

- The issue should contribute toward helping students develop techniques for examining other controversial issues.
- The issue should be suitable for students of the maturity and background represented in the class.
- The issue should be related to the course content and help achieve course objectives.
- The issue should be of continuing significance.

The following guidelines apply to all curricula and co-curricular activities, before and after school, within the school building and outside of the school, or wherever a school group is involved.

Administrative Regulations to Policy 6144  
Controversial Issues (continued)

Students have the right and responsibility to:

1. Research, study and discuss significant issues, reach conclusions and express opinions.
2. Study under competent instruction in an impartial atmosphere and have access to relevant material.
3. Recognize that reasonable people can disagree.
4. Respect the opinions of others.

Teachers have the right and responsibility to:

1. Conduct reasonable study and discussion of controversial issues related to the approved curriculum.
2. Maintain a high degree of personal impartiality and objectivity.
3. Determine the degree and extent a controversial issue will be studied based on the knowledge, maturity and competence of students.
4. Allow divergent positions and opinions to be presented and discussed.
5. Provide resource materials or sources of information to help students reach individual conclusions.
6. Ensure that the issue is current, significant or important. Significant issues are those that concern a considerable number of people, are related to basic principles, or at the moment, are under consideration by the public or media.
7. Recognize that the classroom is a forum for discussing issues and students should feel no responsibility or pressure for reaching an agreement.

A teacher who is in doubt about the advisability of discussing a certain issue should confer with the principal as to the appropriateness of doing so. If the principal and teacher disagree, the principal will refer the matter to the Superintendent of Schools.

The Board of Education recognizes the right of a student not to participate in a discussion of a specific controversial issue. Any resident who has reservations about the teaching of a controversial issue should discuss the concern with the principal. The resident may next appeal to the Superintendent of Schools and, ultimately, the Board of Education.