

Controversial Issues**Guidelines**

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

1. The topic shall be suitable to the age and maturity of the students.
2. Instruction shall be presented in a balanced manner, addressing all sides of the issue without bias or prejudice and without promoting any particular point of view.
3. In the classroom, teachers and staff act on behalf of the Bethany Public School District (District) and are expected to follow the adopted curriculum. In leading or guiding class discussions about issues that may be controversial, a staff member may not advocate the staff member's personal opinion or viewpoint. When necessary, the Superintendent or 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. Adequate 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, the principal or designee shall notify the guest speaker of the policy and this administrative regulation and the expectations and goals regarding the instruction. If the guest speaker is presenting only one point of view on an issue, the staff member shall be responsible for ensuring that students also receive information on opposing viewpoints.

When required by law, such as in regards 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.

The Bethany Board of Education expects administrators, teachers, and staff to exercise professional judgment when deciding whether or not a particular issue is suitable for study or discussion. They shall consult with the Superintendent or designee as necessary to determine the appropriateness of the subject matter, guest speakers, and/or related instructional materials or resources.

Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians of students in the District are responsible:

1. To recognize that it is the responsibility of the school to present controversial issues appropriate to the curriculum.
2. To refrain from attempts to suppress the teaching about controversial issues, assuming that the guidelines of responsibility and appropriateness have been followed.
3. To inform the teacher, Principal, and other appropriate personnel when they have information that indicates controversial issues are being dealt with in an inappropriate manner.

A student or parent/guardian with concerns regarding instruction about controversial issues may communicate directly with the teacher or Principal and/or use appropriate district complaint procedures.

Legal References: Connecticut General Statutes 31-51q
 Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 09/09/1981)
 Keyishian v. Board of Regents 395 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)
 Garcetti v. Ceballos 547 U.S. 410 (2006)
 Johnson v. Poway Unified School District 658 F.3d 954 (9th Cir.) (2011)
 Mayer v. Monroe County Community School Corporation 474 F.3d 477 (7th Cir.) (2007)

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