

Instruction

Controversial Topics

I. Responsibility for Instruction on Controversial Topics

- A. ARSD has a responsibility to include, in various curriculum areas and at all grade levels, content dealing with sensitive topics and materials, some of which will be controversial.
- B. Development of analytical thinking and preparation for citizenship are the primary reasons for including the study of controversial topics or use of controversial materials in the curriculum.
- C. ARSD, as an educational institution, has a responsibility to give the student:
 - 1. An opportunity to study controversial topics or read controversial materials which have political, economic, or social significance about which they will begin to develop a viewpoint.
 - 2. Access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
 - 3. Competent instruction balancing the various points-of-view in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
 - 4. The right to form and express their own thinking on controversial topics or materials without jeopardizing their relations with teachers, peers, or the school.
 - 5. Deliberate effort by the teacher to achieve balance over time in the viewpoints to which students are exposed.

II. Guidelines for the Selection of Controversial Topics

- A. Topics of classroom discussion should, first and foremost, always be driven by ARSD curriculum.
- B. The topic or material should contribute toward helping students develop techniques for examining other controversial topics or materials.
- C. The topic or material should be suitable for students of the maturity and background represented in the respective class.
- D. The topic or material should be related to the standards and course content and help achieve those standards and course objectives.
- E. The topic or material should be of continuing significance to society.
- F. 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.
- G. 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.
- H. The subject matter of the instruction shall not otherwise be prohibited by state or federal law.

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III. Inclusion of Controversial Topics in the Curriculum

Controversial topics may be introduced into the curriculum for one or more of the following expected student outcomes:

- A. Learning to analyze current political, economic and social problems of major concern.
- B. Learning to differentiate fact from opinion and/or propaganda.
- C. Learning to identify and analyze prejudice.
- D. Learning to form and express personal opinions in a courteous, respectful manner without jeopardizing peer, teacher, or school relationships.
- E. Learning respect for the concept of majority and minority opinion and the resulting impact on the societal process.
- F. Learning to draw intelligent conclusions from facts, which may serve as a basis for forming personal opinions.

IV. Limited Opportunities for Parental Opt-Out

Connecticut state law provides limited opportunities for parents/guardians to opt their student(s) out of participation in a school's program of instruction /curriculum.

C.G.S. 10- 16e, allows students with written parental notification to the school to opt out of family life education programs which may be offered by a public school.

C.G.S. 17a-101q allows students with written parental notification to opt out of the sexual abuse prevention and awareness program or any part of it.

C.G.S. 10-18c allows students with written parental notification to opt out of all or part of a firearms safety program if offered by a public school.

C.G.S. 10-18d allows students with written parental notification to opt out of any dissection activities.

C.G.S. 10-19c allows students with written parental notification to the school to opt out of planned, ongoing and systematic instruction of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

A parent should notify the school principal in writing their decision to opt their child out of instruction in one of the four topics listed above. Opt-out notification must be provided on an annual basis. Exempt students will be provided with an opportunity for study or schoolwork when the student would otherwise be participating in the program they have been opted out of.

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V. Academic Freedom

- A. Teachers and administrators shall have the right to determine and select which instructional material and methods are to be used in the schools, subject to budgetary consideration and Board policy.
- B. Partisan views of teachers, administrators, the public, and/or Board members may not be used to suppress (or promote) instructional materials that are otherwise appropriate (or inappropriate).
- C. Teachers' personal opinions may be presented provided that the teacher does not use them to indoctrinate students. Teachers are expected to label their opinion as such when it is expressed as a personal point of view.
- D. Teachers shall not penalize students who disagree with them or who present views which are unpopular and/or not widely accepted.

VI. Guest Speakers

When a guest speaker is invited to make a presentation related to a controversial issue, the Superintendent or designee shall notify him/her 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.