

**CONNECTICUT BAR FOUNDATION
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QUINTIN JOHNSTONE
2025-2026 STATEWIDE HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST TOPIC**

“After the Gavel Falls: Navigating Education Policy in the Wake of *Mahmoud v. Taylor*”

In the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, Cooper High School has received a surge of parental opt-out requests for curriculum content that allegedly conflicts with religious beliefs. The ruling affirms that parents have the right to exempt their children from instruction that “substantially interferes” with their religious upbringing. However, the application of this ruling has led to inconsistent treatment of students and raised serious legal questions.

Senior **David Kim** was excused from AP Biology lessons on evolution and genetics after his parents submitted a written opt-out request. David complied without incident, though he privately expressed concern about missing essential content for his intended career in medicine.

Junior **Emma Walsh**, however, refused to leave her AP Chemistry class during a unit on carbon dating, despite her parents’ opt-out request. Emma argued that the lesson did not conflict with her personal beliefs and that, as a nearly 18-year-old student, she should have the right to decide what she learns. The school suspended Emma for insubordination, citing the parents’ authority under *Mahmoud v. Taylor*.

Emma’s suspension has sparked debate. Critics argue that the school applied the law inconsistently—granting David’s opt-out without issue while punishing Emma for asserting her autonomy. Others question whether the school is legally obligated to enforce parental opt-outs when the student objects.

The Board of Education now seeks legal guidance on whether Emma’s suspension was lawful and appropriate under current constitutional and educational standards.

As legal counsel to the Board of Education, draft a memorandum analyzing the validity of Emma Walsh’s suspension. In your analysis, address the following questions:

1. **Should *Mahmoud v. Taylor* require schools to enforce parental opt-out requests even when the student objects?**
 - o Consider the legal rights of minors in educational settings.
 - o Evaluate whether Emma’s age and expressed autonomy affect the school’s obligations.
2. **Was Emma’s suspension for insubordination justified, or could it be challenged as a violation of her educational or constitutional rights?**

- o Assess whether the disciplinary action was proportionate and procedurally sound.
 - o Consider potential claims of viewpoint discrimination or denial of access to education.
3. **What policies should the district adopt to ensure consistent, lawful handling of future opt-out conflicts between parents and students?**
- o Recommend procedures for evaluating opt-out requests.
 - o Suggest guidelines for balancing parental rights with student autonomy and educational integrity.

Support your analysis with relevant legal principles, case law, and policy considerations. Your goal is to help the Board navigate this complex issue with clarity, fairness, and legal compliance.