



Strengthening Inclusion Work through Civil Discourse

**SAIS DEI Institute
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Our Work Today

- 1. Consider how civil discourse skills empower students and engender inclusion**
- 2. Learn about resources for civil discourse programs**
- 3. Create models for implementing civil discourse skills and curricula**

So what is Civil Discourse exactly?

“Robust, honest, frank, and constructive dialogue and deliberation that seeks to advance the public interest” -National Institute for Civil Discourse, 2011¹

“Listen respectfully to different opinions and experiences, try out ideas and positions, and give--and get--constructive feedback without fear or intimidation” -Facing History and Ourselves²

“Civil Discourse is truthful, productive, audience-based, about listening *and* talking, and is each Speaker’s own responsibility.

Civil Discourse is not mere politeness, an exercise in martyrdom, about telling other people who they are, purely performative”
-American University School of Public Affairs³

Why a skills-based approach?

Skills are

- Measurable
- Adaptable for different age groups
- A means for recursive, scaffolded teaching
- Non-partisan
- A framework for students to be metacognitive about their strengths and challenges
- A framework for objective feedback



How can Civil Discourse strengthen DEI work?

When you consider the *interpersonal* barriers that that students face among their peers in forwarding DEI work at your school, what are they? Look beyond institutional and cultural barriers.

A skills-based Civil Discourse curriculum will help!

Civil Discourse skills

- Create a level playing field for students
- Represent deep, ongoing intellectual work
- Remove barriers for students (e.g. discomfort, time, motivation)
- Give students a reason for sharing their views
- Offer a tangible way to bring people in to conversation
- Welcome parents

Sample Civil Discourse skills

Laurel's Center for Research on Girls investigated literature and research on Civil Discourse⁴ and found six skills.

Three Emotional:

- Extending Empathy
- Accepting Discomfort
- Braving Controversy

Three Cognitive:

- Cultivating Curiosity
- Taking Perspective
- Engaging Effectively

A few notes on Civil Discourse skills

- Self awareness and awareness of the situation and players involved
- Self understanding and curiosity
- Self regulation
- Discussion NOT Debate
- Modification for age appropriateness

Implementation: Potential Barriers and Solutions

Limited Resources: Time and Humanpower

Build Civil Discourse curricula into existing programs: advisory, Chapel, homeroom, or existing courses, departmental work, or lesson plans

- key to ask teachers to adapt skills for appropriate age levels
- ideally use a scaffolded skills approach with practice over time and emphasis on less concrete skills later on

Constituents' Concerns

Ground Civil Discourse in what it really is:

- Inherently non-partisan (it necessitates multiple perspectives)
- Deep, intellectual work
- A fulfillment of your school's mission
- The building blocks for democracy and engaged citizenship

Implementation: Getting Started



Consider your school:

- Where would it make sense to fold in Civil Discourse?
- Who could help you move it forward?
- How could students learn and practice skills during time that already exists at your school?

Ideally work with a colleague or a person in a similar role to yours.

Use the resources slide for ideas as needed.

Some Resources for Civil Discourse Curricula

A Skills Framework: [Engaging Civil Discourse monograph](#) (for purchase only)

Curricular and Lesson Plan Suggestions:

- [AllSides for Schools](#): resources for multiple perspectives on various topics
- American University: [Project on Civil Discourse](#)
- ASCD: [Classroom Discourse as Civil Discourse](#)
- Ed Circuit: [Academic Discourse: 4 Key Aspects](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves: [Fostering Civil Discourse](#)
- Manchester Community College: [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Inclusive teaching & civil discourse](#)
- Katherine Cadwell: [Strategies for Classroom Dialogue](#)

People and Organizations:

- [Narrative 4](#)
- [R. E. A. L. Discussion](#)
- Sarah Wilson, TAIS Director (Sarah@TAIStn.com or 615-465-4881, ext. 1)

Sources

1. Brosseau, C. (2011). "Executive session: Civil Discourse in progress." *Frankly Speaking*, p.1.
2. Facing History and Ourselves. *Fostering civil discourse: A guide for classroom conversations*, p.1.
3. American University School of Public Affairs. (2023, February 3). American University Project on Civil Discourse: What is Civil Discourse?.
<https://www.american.edu/spa/civildiscourse/what-is-civil-discourse.cfm>
4. Cordiano, T., Damour, L., and Wilson, S. 2019. Laurel Center for Research on Girls. *Engaging in Civil Discourse*. https://issuu.com/store/publishers/laurelschool/issues/lcrg_civil_discourse_digital
- 5.

