



November 3, 2020

**Dear Town School Parents and Guardians,**

It is a true joy to be back on campus this week. Seeing your boys bounding into school (albeit via lines and temperature checks!) with their usual positive energy is a powerful reminder of how fortunate we all are to have each other and this caring community. I know well the sustaining and healing power of our community and I encourage each of us to lean into it as the election results unfold. Our Town School values can hold us through this unknowing period in the same way that they shape our school-based decisions on a daily basis. **The elections are an important moment in time, but our ongoing commitment to living our school values is a very good reason to hold onto real hope in this moment and long into the future.**

In anticipation of the elections, early last summer I charged a committee to conduct research about teaching the election process in developmentally appropriate ways and to create a draft of a Statement on Civil Discourse. The purpose was to ensure we had a solid foundation from which to support faculty-led healthy discourse throughout the elections and beyond. In late summer, the team - Cara Wood, Executive Assistant to the Head, Special Projects Coordinator and Covid Liaison; Xavier McDougald, 4th Grade Resident Teacher; and Samuel Beal, 5th Grade Humanities Resident Teacher - shared materials and presented a statement draft to the senior administrative team and faculty to gather feedback. The Board of Trustees also reviewed an early draft to offer input and to share questions. Through grounding our statement in research, community feedback, and our Town values, we have created a collaborative tool to help navigate conversation about this year's election as well as topics in years to come. **We share our [Statement on Civil Discourse](#) with you now as a resource to consider for your conversations at home and within the broader community.** It is entirely possible we will revisit and refine the statement in the future as we work to realize its meaning; the process of living it is our priority.

At a recent school-wide faculty meeting, we spent time reading our statement and reflecting upon some guiding principles for our work as teachers of your boys:

- We can and should discuss issues and ask questions to encourage students how to think, not what to think, from multiple perspectives.

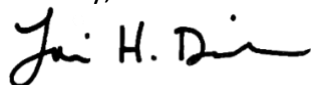
- We can and should ground our conversations in our shared Town core values, character development which includes cultural competency, and social-emotional development.
- We must prepare ahead of time for these conversations.
- As teachers in a K-8 school we avoid naming support for specific candidates knowing that each student comes from a family that has its own set of values and beliefs.

We also used these guiding principles to facilitate discussion of scenarios that might occur within the daily life of a K-8 school so that we are better prepared to model the principles of civil discourse. In addition, at the most recent Community Building and Inclusion Meeting, parents were invited to read the Civil Discourse Statement and to consider through a parent lens the same scenarios that faculty explored. In both the faculty and parent discussions, the idea of grounding our discourse in our shared values of respect, curiosity, belonging, integrity and joy resonated with the group.

Throughout the school, teachers have or will fold in age-appropriate information about the election process. Regardless of whether 2nd graders are wondering out loud about a presidential election for the very first time or 7th graders are debating which party platform they prefer, we can always frame the conversation by reminding them that "there's a Town value for that." **Respect, Curiosity, Belonging, Integrity and Joy are always at the forefront of how we guide our boys to be thoughtful citizens, regardless of how they vote as adults.**

While you might share my strong feelings for the outcomes of these elections, I hope you also are encouraged to know that Town School is continuing to build a healthier future for civil discourse within our community and beyond.

Warmly,



Lorri Hamilton Durbin, Head of School



PS. Helpful parenting resources about the elections: "[How to Guide Your Child through Election Season](#)" and "[Young Voters Guide to Social Media and the News](#)", both by Common Sense Media, and the recording of the [Child Mind Institute on Healthy Civil Discourse for Families](#) held last week.