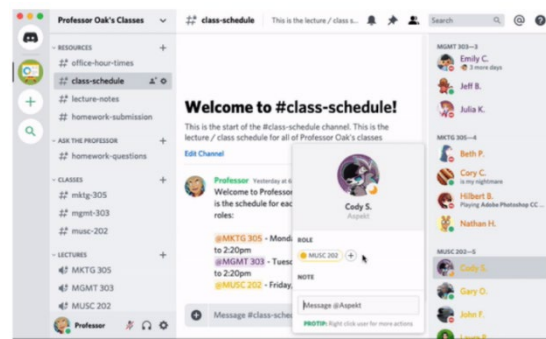


DISCORD AT ARAGON HIGH SCHOOL: A PLATFORM FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION

[Discord](#) is an American VoIP, instant messaging and digital distribution platform designed for creating communities, especially among gamers. It was originally designed for gamers to communicate with each other in real time while playing. Users form “servers”, persistent chatrooms made of text, video, and voice channels in which invited members can communicate openly or privately with others by text, voice, video, and file sharing. Discord now has over 250 million users (roughly equivalent to daily Snapchat users) and runs on Windows, macOS, Android, iOS, iPads, Linux, and web browsers. Discord was co-founded by CEO Jason Citron and CTO Stanislav Vishnevskiy – who lives in [San Mateo](#)!



Discord at Aragon High School – During the Spring 2021 semester at Aragon High School, the Administration, Director of Student Activities, and the Leadership Program’s Technology Commission have agreed to pilot Discord as an after-school student community center, especially for younger students. Our Panorama Survey and MTSS Tier 1-related student connectedness surveys indicate students have not met new friends in the virtual environment and are feeling disconnected from peers. Aragon’s pilot of Discord enables students to develop friendships and communities in spite of remote classes, especially among freshman. Students on our Tech Commission have worked diligently with the Director of Student Activities and the Administration to ensure that our Discord can be securely managed, available only to Aragon Students, and accessible only during non-school hours.

In order to join Aragon’s Discord, student identity must be confirmed through a request form, along with providing us with a pre-existing Discord username, which is then added to the private Aragon server. Students also digitally sign the form in agreement to the rules and guidelines, similar to the SMUHSD Acceptable and Responsible Use Policies they signed at the beginning of the School Year. Although students are over 13 and able to join Discord on their own, Aragon also notifies families (via email) of the student’s request to join. Further information about Discord for families is here on [Common Sense Media](#).

The Aragon Discord server features channels of grade levels and of topics including video games, art, music, and, most recently, politics. While the Administration confirms students for the platform, the Moderators are all students in the Leadership Program that report to the Director of Student Activities and Administration if needed for any sort of concern or violation of policy. In addition, verified Discord bots, as well as Leadership’s own designed bots, work to detect and block spam, swearing (by case match, so variations are also blocked), inappropriate content, and to mute users for lengths of time if necessary. Gaming remains a significant draw of engagement, but students estimate that it comprises about 40-50% of overall engagement. A channel for politics was created due to popular demand, and Aragon’s student moderators claim that conduct has been overall very civil; students are aware that this is an actively moderated school server.

Aragon’s Discord server is locked down during school hours so that it is not a distraction, but it is accessible after school and during school holidays. Teachers are not involved with the server, as its purpose is to be a student hangout, and teachers do not use Discord for classroom or instructional purposes; it is platform designed for social interaction and connection. Aragon’s Student Activities Director is thrilled with the level of student engagement and believes it has been successful in creating community for Aragon High School.

Safety Concerns regarding Discord in general: Please review the [Common Sense Media Guide here](#). Users can create or join public servers by sharing an invitation link, or private servers with an invitation link and entry approval by the server creator. (Please note that Aragon is a private server, and the invitation comes after the verification process as described earlier.) Unlike other social media platforms, users cannot browse or scroll through servers or user profiles, nor amass “likes”. Discord does not have parental controls but [encourages](#) parents to go over specific Privacy & Safety settings with their child: Users can accept or deny friend requests for private messaging, limit friend requests (from everyone, friends of friends, or within the server only), block other users, enable moderating bots against objectionable content, enable a content filter against explicit content in direct messages, and report abuse. Discord has NSFW servers for 18+ based on user-provided birthdate; mature content is available. [Safety](#) remains a [priority](#) as Discord policies and procedures have undergone several recent changes. Discord abuse includes “raiding” (invasive messaging) of servers, spam, malware, harassment and [cyberbullying](#), doxxing, exploitative content – non-consensual pornography and child exploitation, and its utilization by hatemongers, [child predators](#), human traffickers, and [cybercriminals](#).

Recent Safety Changes: In 2017, Discord was found by the FBI and then by the media spotlight to have been used by the organizers of the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which led to the subsequent cracking down against white supremacist and other extremist servers. This commitment continued through the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. In June 2020, Discord launched a [safety center](#) resource with outlines of policies, guides, and recommendations for users, parents, and educators. With the dramatic increase in users, Discord has been developing and increasingly relying on [algorithms](#) to detect and block harmful activity and users, including suspected child predators. Discord has thus become more proactive in policing content rather than relying only on user reports to its [Trust & Safety team](#), of which employment has doubled along with the number of abuse reports.

[Bark](#) ranked Discord as 5th of Top 5 platforms for violence, hate speech, and bullying, and 3rd for depression and suicidal ideation. Instagram ranked higher than Discord in all these categories.

[Discord’s Privacy Policy](#) – Discord does not sell, but may share, user information to 3rd parties. Only email and birthdate are required for registration, and Discord generally does not have user demographic information. Users can request “[data packages](#)” of their account, activity, messages, and servers. Discord does not rely on ads but rather sells premium “Nitro” accounts for users at \$9.99/month or \$99.99/year.

Concluding Notes: There is great potential for students to use Discord responsibly within private servers, moderated by its users, among friends who know each other. Most people enjoy Discord for the ability to chat over video, voice, and text in real time for gaming and other hobbies. However, students are also fairly free to encounter or post mature and inappropriate content, and there is risk in private messaging strangers. Discord has been formally banned or blocked by some schools while other schools have embraced Discord for classrooms, clubs, and communities. Common Sense Media gives [3/5 stars](#).

In Education: Discord increasingly includes non-gaming communities, particularly school clubs ([200+ colleges](#) are on Discord), and, since [coronavirus](#), for [classroom use](#). In March 2020, they increased their user limit of Go Live (screenshare and video chat functionality) from 10 to 50 people, largely for classroom purposes, and the website [offers support for setup for a classroom-based servers](#). [Teachers can use Discord](#) to open servers for their classes with text and voice channels (using Go Live) for lectures, homework, chat threads, conferencing, and office hours. However, most schools that utilize Discord prefer it for social organizations rather than for classes.

LearnPlatform, our EdTech effectiveness system, rates Discord above the 75th percentile for quality of features and content and for impact on effectiveness and learning. However, it was ranked in the 57th percentile for “Recommend to Colleague”.

A+	Ease of Use	77th percentile
A+	Quality of the Features	78th percentile
A+	Quality of the Content	77th percentile
A+	Technical Merit	78th percentile
A+	Alignment with Learning Objectives	75th percentile
A+	Impact on Student Learning	75th percentile
A+	Impact on Teaching Effectiveness	78th percentile
10	Recommend to Colleague	57th percentile
A+	Professional Development	79th percentile

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and please let the Administration know if you have further questions.