



OLD COLONY

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January 7, 2021

Dear Old Colony Families,

Over the course of the past 24 hours, we have witnessed significant events taking place in Washington D.C. The storming of our Capitol was followed by a set of bipartisan speeches offered by representatives from all walks of life. There is much to be learned from history, both immediate and distant. Words change worlds. They start wars and end wars. Our approach to disagreement is a pivotal fork in the trajectory of our own futures and an important skill we must pass on to our students.

It is with great pride that I write to you in celebration of the tact our students, staff, and families have taken over the course of the past year in the midst of a multitude of events that have challenged the unity of our nation. At Old Colony, each event has allowed us the opportunity for discussion, civil discourse, reflection, and growth. We have come together on a multitude of occasions to prove that despite any differences, we are capable of rising above the issues.

While the events of January 6, 2021 were anticipated, the impact of these events on individuals within our community will be varied. Our Constitution and the law have affirmed the November election results and support the certification of these results. We as parents, guardians, and educators, have an obligation to reflect upon these moments with our students as we prepare them for the world beyond our walls. You will frame this moment with your children in alignment with your family's values, which may or may not be uniform within your own household. We will do so in the spirit of creating leaders capable of engaging in civil discourse while working to contribute in a positive manner to benefit the greater good.

As a reminder, our teachers are not taking political stances or teaching from one political framework, we teach dispositions and help students have robust discussion, disagreements and collaborative sessions. The following excerpt is from an email shared by our Academic Coordinator and Principal this morning to support our staff in the discussions that may arise.

How can we approach these conversations with students? Kira M. Newman's article "[Nine Tips for Talking to Kids about Trauma](#)" was written after the attacks in Paris in 2015, but some tips the author suggests that are particularly relevant to today's events include:

- **Initiate the conversation.** Asking students what they know, how they feel, and what they are thinking about can assure them that there is space to discuss current events openly. It's also important to try to figure out what they need; some students may want nothing more than an escape from the news for an hour, while others might feel an intense need to understand exactly what is happening. Try to be flexible and responsive as best you can.
- **Find out what students know, and correct misconceptions or misinformation that they may have.** We know that our students gain a lot of their information through social media, where truth and falsehood can mingle freely. Invite them to share what they already know and what they are curious about or wondering; answer questions that you can, and be honest about what we don't yet know.

- **Encourage students to share their feelings, and share your feelings if you feel comfortable doing so.** As appropriate, discussing your own thoughts and reactions can communicate to students that what they're feeling is natural and normal, and empower them to speak more freely about what's on their mind.

How can we equip students to combat misinformation? As misinformation about the election results and unrest in Washington continues to spread, a tool like this one from the News Literacy Project on "[practicing good information hygiene](#)" can help students navigate the news this week.

How should we discuss these issues with students without inappropriately "taking a side"? Ultimately, this is a question of your own professional judgment to which there is no easy answer. Some possible things to consider:

- **Civics teachers can and should defend civic dispositions and values and help students distinguish truth, opinion, and misinformation.** In their book [The Political Classroom](#), scholars Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy argue that "the political classroom is undergirded by values that promote a particular view of democratic life"; in particular, they identify the values of political equality, tolerance, autonomy, fairness, civic engagement, and political literacy as ones that are foundational to this work. They urge teachers to make instructional choices when facilitating discussion in ways that further these six aims—and they note that these values transcend partisanship and are fundamental to our democratic life.
- **As history teachers, we have skills that can help students understand how and why these events are happening by putting them in context.** Using tools like [Facing History's current events "explainers"](#) can help us give students additional context about the history of things like political polarization, the transfer of power, and electoral unrest in this country. We have the ability to help students both understand the here and now as well as take the long view to see how it fits into the arc of our nation's history.

Finally, the **#sschat Twitter network** also had a discussion in which teachers crowd-sourced approaches and resources to address the day's events with students; [you can read the contributions here](#) or see the [compiled spreadsheet here](#).

We also share the resources listed below as a cross-section of resources that can be used by our staff. These resources may also be useful to you.

Resources for Parents & Families

Tips for Supporting Children

[Supporting Our Children In Difficult Times](#) -- Center for Children & Youth

[ADL - Talking with Young People After Election](#)

[Tips for talking with children about election results](#) - Allina Health

Civic Discourse

[Facing History's Guide to Civil Discourse](#)

[Resources for a Civil Classroom from Teaching Tolerance](#)

Resources for Teaching the Election

[Facing History - Responding to the 2020 US Presidential Election](#)

[Election Conversations and Resources - American School Counselors](#)

[Teaching about Elections](#) from the ADL

We thank you for your continued partnership as we navigate new paths together. Wishing you a happy and healthy 2021.

Sincerely,



Aaron L. Polansky
Superintendent-Director