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CAMPUS DISCOURSE

Tools for Classroom Practice

CAMPUS DISCOURSE AT RIVERDALE

Campus Discourse at Riverdale grew from a need to communicate how freedom of expression and open discourse fulfill the school's mission of developing minds, building character, and creating community. For much of the school's history, these principles were implicit in its practices. The [Statement on Campus Discourse](#) foregrounds the assumptions that are the foundation of Riverdale's work, ensures that all members of the community understand and appreciate them, and provides a framework for engaging in constructive discourse that facilitates an equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environment.

This collection of tools provides a peek into some of the practical frameworks for implementing discourse. As we continue to develop models and practices that reach beyond the classroom, our goal is to share an actionable collection of resources for school communities and practitioners looking to expand Discourse within classroom spaces.

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The most critical points of this pamphlet for all community members to understand are:

1
—

As a school, our priority is to foster discourse that yields learning.

At Riverdale, students develop social, emotional, and intellectual skills that enable them to build relationships and collaborate in the service of learning.

2
—

Students grow in knowledge and character when they grapple with the reality of difference. In our diverse community, open discourse helps us cultivate empathy for one another and understand views that are different from our own.

3
—

Campus discourse thrives when everyone in our community feels a sense of belonging. At Riverdale, community members and invited guests may not engage in abusive or hateful speech that undermines our efforts to foster an equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environment.

4
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Riverdale students learn that arguments that challenge or threaten their interests or values are not necessarily hateful arguments. The school welcomes legitimate political speech that might affirm or critique specific beliefs or actions and the activists, voters, and politicians who support those beliefs or actions.

5
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Intellectually rich, open discourse is not a right; it is a collective achievement made possible by our relationships with one another.

6
—

By virtue of the education they receive here, Riverdale graduates should be able to investigate and understand beliefs that they do not hold, to critique and construct their own points of view, and to participate humanely and constructively in dialogue with others.

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**For our youngest learners, these main points
are simplified to these six tenets:**

1
-

**We hold discourse
to learn, we learn
to hold discourse.**

4
-

**Diversity needs
difference.
Empathy needs
understanding.**

2
-

**We challenge ideas;
we allow ideas to
challenge us.**

5
-

**Discourse is a gift,
not a given. We are
responsible for what we
can achieve together.**

3
-

**We believe in belonging.
We use speech that
elevates, not escalates.**

6
-

**We learn to respect all
ideas, and inspect all
ideas.**

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At each grade level K-5, this could look like:

K

show
gratitude

share the air

1

acknowledge
your confusion

seek to understand someone's
ideas by asking questions

2

walk away or seek help if a
conversation feels unsafe or if
you can't participate
constructively

make space for
grace & repair
mistakes

3

give
intellectual
support

be curious about
why someone
isn't speaking

4

offer evidence
for what you believe &
acknowledge what you don't
know

notice & respond to people's
emotions as well as their
intellectual arguments

5

patiently
accept a lack of clear-cut
resolution

embrace
complexity

For more on each skill, see the essay
titled "Listening: What you can do" in
[Campus Discourse: Teaching &
Learning Resources](#)

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Feedback and reflection are necessary for growth. Rubrics like this can be shared with students for self-reflection or be used as a guide for teachers' feedback to students. Here's a single-point rubric:

Areas for Improvement	Skill	Evidence of Exceeding
	show gratitude	
	share the air	
	acknowledge your confusion	
	seek to understand someone's ideas by asking questions	
	repair mistakes	
	notice & respond to people's emotions as well as their intellectual arguments	
	offer evidence for what you believe & acknowledge what you don't know	
	patiently accept a lack of clear-cut resolution	

For more on feedback, see the essay, "The Role of Teachers" in [Campus Discourse: Teaching & Learning Resources](#)



WHAT'S NEXT?

We continue to be focused on developing programmatic tools, including more developmentally appropriate language for our youngest learners and expanded mechanisms for feedback to increase accountability for our older students.

Development is underway on more open-source digital and physical resources for external school communities and practitioners looking to expand discourse in their classrooms.

