



The Village School of North Bennington
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Dear Families,

Given everything that is going on in the world, and since we are less than two weeks away from the highly contentious 2020 presidential election, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest that we consider using this as a teachable moment for our children. Elections can bring about strong emotions and reactions. Coupled with anxiety from the pandemic and issues of racial and social justice in the news, this can make for an especially confusing and challenging time for children. How we talk to them about these issues and help to frame their understanding and responses is not only important for their current wellbeing; it's also a lifelong lesson.

Our school values raising civic-minded and informed children, and I have given a lot of thought about how our school can approach conversations around the election and sensitive issues. I believe doing so comes down to remembering a few basic guiding values:

Be Safe • Be Kind • Be Respectful • Have Fun!

These principles came out of one of the most important student-led achievements I have ever been part of during my time at the Village School. A group of rising fourth, fifth, and sixth graders came together in the summer of 2019 to create a code for us all to learn and live by. Out of that energetic and wonderful discussion came the Village School Constitution, which is very simple, yet also wonderfully deep and profound. If we, as individuals and as a community, really embrace these ideals, we can engage with and learn from one another.

Be Safe - It is important that all students, staff, and families feel supported and safe here at school and in the greater community. If we are safe, then we can have difficult conversations across party lines, racial issues, or any other political or cultural divide.

Be Kind - We try to teach young people that being kind is about both their words and their bodies. Harmful actions may have immediate consequences, but hurtful words may be longer-lasting and more impactful. We hope the lessons of kindness can extend well beyond the classroom.

Be Respectful - This is about listening and trying to meet others where they are and being open to hearing different viewpoints. Everyone has a story, and if we respect them enough to listen to their story without interruption or intimidation and they in turn listen to ours, it may lead to a deeper understanding.

Have Fun! - Many of us would agree that we have the most fun when we are together, and this is only possible in an environment that is safe, kind and respectful.

As we have conversations here at school about the election, the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, or the supreme court, we will do our very best to adhere to and honor the Village School Constitution. Our intention is for the conversation to be a dialogue, rather than a confrontation and to make the discussion about issues not individuals. In the older grades many of the teachers set aside time to talk about current events and what kind of impact the events are having or how they feel about a situation. In the younger grades, these lessons may be about concepts of sharing and fairness. As an institution of learning, the Village School strives to teach students how to access information from reliable resources so they can make their own decisions. In the information age, this may be one of the most important lessons we can impart to our students.

The final line of the Village School's Mission states: *We welcome families into a community-wide collaboration to help our children grow into their best selves - responsible citizens and stewards of the greater world, makers of the future.* We want our students to be able to navigate difficult conversations and situations, because, in the end, they are the “makers of the future.” Ultimately, we hope that they will challenge injustice and inequality in all its forms and help to make the world a better place.

Here at school we can help lead difficult conversations and guide the discussion, but a great deal of learning happens outside of school. There will be people excited as the election results become available in November, but there will also be people who are disappointed. How we respond is a lesson for our children. What a powerful lesson it will be if we can respond through the lens of the Village School Constitution and think about safety, kindness, and respect.

With deep respect,



Timothy J. Newbold