



Communicating about Civil Discourse with Classroom Stakeholders

Course Context from Instructor, Amelia Bochain:

“Civil discourse may sound radical to some stakeholders—especially if they’re imagining chaotic debates or worried about impropriety.

But, in reality, being proactive about communication with families, administrators, and department leads will not only build your classroom community, but will also create trust in those who may be skeptical about the use of civil discourse in your classroom.

The key is making stakeholders feel like partners in the process, rather than spectators on the sidelines.

At the beginning of the school year, send a “welcome” communication directly to families—with your administrator copied. This isn’t just another syllabus—it’s your chance to frame civil discourse as an exciting, essential component of your curriculum. Explain how students will develop the skills to listen deeply, think critically, and engage respectfully with complex ideas.”

Check Out Amelia’s Email Template Below!

Greetings, [School Name] families!

I'm [your name] and I will be your student's [Course Name] teacher this year. Hopefully, I will meet many of you at Back to School night! In the meantime, I wanted to provide you with a few details about our classroom and the course itself.

Our Class

[Course name] is a very relevant and active class. Throughout the year, students will have the opportunity to develop and defend their perspective on various issues both in discussion and through their writing. We will also be able to stimulate many authentic experiences including a [list classroom activities such as “debate/election, Congressional hearing, and a trial” here].

That said, [Course Name], may be a transition from the history classes that students have taken previously. If your student needs additional assistance, please encourage them to ask questions in class or come to see me during study hall. I am always happy to help!



Civil Discourse in Our Classroom

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." -Thomas Jefferson

This quote is displayed in my classroom and is one I'll reference many times throughout the year to your students. One of the skills we focus on in [Course Name] is civil discourse—the ability to respectfully discuss the past and present with the focus on *learning*, not *winning*. We start out the year with fairly simple discussions. This week, we'll be considering: [insert this week's compelling question]. Then, as the year progresses, we build up our skills to:

- Use evidence to support claims
- Analyze multiple perspectives
- Speak in a whole-class discussion
- Active listening (listening to understand, rather than listening to respond)
- Use respectful phrases to disagree
- Engage in discussions about current events that are relevant to the curriculum

These discussions are a powerful instructional tool. Not only do they excite and engage the students, but they also teach the strong communication skills necessary in academic and professional settings. I encourage you all to speak to your students about these discussions—what did they learn? How did they interact with students who disagreed with them? Were their opinions respected? What evidence did they use to support their claims? These discussions at home will deepen their learning and help build up their discourse skills!

If you have any questions about the class, please don't hesitate to reach out. Looking forward to a year of great civic learning!

Sincerely,
[Your Name]