



# Fostering a Civic Space in Every Classroom

The Essential Question for Civics is: “How should we all live together?”

Teachers committed to creating civic classrooms should consider the following:

- **Aims:** What are your goals for your students? How do they align with your school’s community goals?
  - Possible goals: civic equality, tolerance and an open mind for diverse views, student civic autonomy, fairness, civic engagement, civic literacy.
- **Context:** What are the backgrounds of the students in your classroom? Your greater community?
  - Consider socio-economic status, different learning abilities and styles, cultural diversity, languages, and the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the students in the classroom.
- **Evidence:** Use the most current, best practices of teaching and learning.

*Considering your **Aims, Context, and Evidence** before you teach leads to good use of professional judgment as you navigate issues that may arise in your classroom and/or school community.*

Best practices that support the goals of a civic classroom:

- Teachers structure discussions with intention and student supports:
  - Create civil discourse norms, and enforce them consistently.
  - Create and practice talk routines with students (include sentence frames for student discussions).
  - Incorporate student-led discussions with limited, purposeful teacher guidance.
  - Provide students time to research a question before a discussion for deeper understanding, and employ the Claim-Evidence-Reasoning framework to construct effective arguments (no “on the fly” discussions!).
  - No clear conclusions exist about whether teachers should reveal their social/political bias to their students. *Research shows that whichever way that a teacher decides, they should stick to that decision with fidelity and be explicit about their choice with their students at all times.*
- Recognize the value of both purposeful discussion and deliberation:
  - Discussion occurs when students attempt to listen to each other’s points of view, weigh different inputs as they formulate their own ideas, and practice expressing their opinions respectfully.
  - Deliberation takes place when a group of students weighs the merits of a proposal for action within a community and develops practical solutions that do not privilege some members of the community over others.
  - Find balance between authenticity and civility- encourage topics relevant to students where they may share passionate, personal, and impactful views.
  - Monitor discussions and be prepared to mitigate any effects those discussions may have on singular student(s); meet with impacted student(s) 1:1 when there is a noticeable negative impact on them from classroom discussions.
  - Teachers and students reflect on both the substance of their exchanges and the processes they use to interact with one another.

*In doing so, students learn to consider each other as civic equals, support their ideas with evidence, and consider how their behaviors/points of view affect others.*

- Teachers should seek out support from their content partners/departments/school staff/administration surrounding shared language structures and practices to create a schoolwide civic culture.

“Fostering a Civic Classroom” was created by Classroom Law Project and is inspired by Drs. Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy, authors of *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015).