



Flintridge Prep's Guidelines on Civic Engagement and the School Environment October 2020

Civic engagement is defined as "individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation." – [American Psychological Association](#)

"Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." – [Thomas Ehrlich](#)

Flintridge Prep values civic engagement and respects the wealth of thoughts, opinions, and experiences that exist within our school community. We encourage our students to be knowledgeable about current events and key issues happening around the world. As our students actively engage in political and social issues, we ask all participants to embrace opportunities for intellectual growth through exposure to new ideas. We do so with the following norms:

- Speak from the "I" perspective. Be authentic.
- The only assumption we should make is the assumption of positive intent.
- Challenge yourself and others with grace aimed at clarity.
- Listen to understand, not to judge.
- Disagreement is a learning opportunity.
- Develop appreciation of and curiosity about the unfamiliar.
- Lean into discomfort.
- Practice your capacity to honor multiple perspectives.
- As we remain impassioned, also remain respectful and civil.
- The conversation is ongoing.

These norms help us to navigate difficult conversations and situations about complicated political and social matters. As we engage civically, we also engage civilly, refraining from expressions and/or actions that devalue, demean, and dehumanize others, as this violates the norms, expectations, and rules of our community.

Civic engagement allows our students to develop and practice key skills for leadership and an engaged, balanced, and responsible life. Major skills associated with civic engagement include:

- active listening
- deep reflection and analytical thought
- organization of thought, considering evidence and counter-evidence
- research and data interpretation skills
- creative problem-solving
- effective communication skills



- ability to hear, understand, and hold multiple perspectives
- awareness of the world beyond our campus

As we practice civic engagement, we ask that our students and employees be mindful about clothing, stickers, buttons, and other such items with political or social messages on their persons or in their virtual spaces. There is a line between advocating and offending which must be vetted situationally. For example, wearing a campaign t-shirt that supports one's preferred candidate is okay, as long as the messaging on the t-shirt does not include material deemed offensive or demeaning to others.

Employees and students should be mindful about the expression of their own views on campus and on social media—careful to speak in their own voice as opposed to speaking for the school, and with an understanding that the expression of personal views could affect the learning or working environment of those who do not hold those views. The promotion of messages, symbols, or images that violate our Honor Code or Mission Statement are prohibited.

An election cycle, especially a Presidential election, provides clear opportunities for civic engagement. We appreciate the learning that can happen as we explore and vet candidates, platforms, and key issues in an election. During an election cycle, we may engage in conversations and forums as long as the focus remains on the issues and does not devolve into a mocking or personal attack on candidates or other individuals.

In the practice of civic engagement, there may be times when students would like to hold political or social demonstrations on campus or in our virtual spaces, such as a protest, walk-out, poster or t-shirt campaign, the wearing of ribbons to raise awareness, etc. To ensure alignment with our guidelines on civic engagement, students should speak with the appropriate administrator before proceeding with such demonstrations on campus or in their virtual spaces.

Ultimately, we see civic engagement as an element of a quality education. Diego Duran-Medina says in his article in the [Winter 2017 issue of Independent School magazine](#):

“Teaching the new skills for global citizenship requires consideration of three related, yet distinct, spheres: civic engagement, research skills, and social media...Where is the space for students to develop the intellectual and emotional skills to exercise what it means to become a competent and engaged global citizen in school and beyond? Such an education is not only about teaching citizen responsibilities and rights but also about helping each student develop the actual ability to use his or her voice to spur action and to speak on an issue. It is about helping students move from the *what* to the *why* and from the effects of a problem to the root causes.”

Civic engagement is one of the many ways that we live our school's mission and values and prepare our students for transformative leadership.