



Guidelines for Civic Engagement and Political Discourse at Moses Brown

Mission

As a Friends school, Moses Brown adheres to the Quaker tenet that every human being possesses a unique Inner Light reflecting dignity and worth. We work to create a sense of belonging in all students and an environment where all are valued, respected and supported, and all are able to learn and thrive. We seek to instill in each rising generation the knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make the world a better place for all.

Civic Engagement and Ethical Leadership

Civic engagement---working for positive change in one's community---is a time-honored characteristic of Quakers and Quaker institutions such as Moses Brown. At MB, we seek to prepare students to be active, culturally literate, and ethical citizens and leaders in our local, national and global communities. To that end, in 2013 the school formally identified a set of attributes it strives to foster in its students, collectively known as Ethical Leadership. Ethical leadership encompasses traits such as:

- The ability to act and lead with integrity;
- The capacity to view the world from multiple perspectives;
- Respecting the rights and dignity of others; valuing others as much as self; listening to and empathizing with others;
- Understanding complex forces that often are in tension, e.g., truth and loyalty, the good of the one and the good of the many;
- Awareness of historical and contemporary forces (e.g., political, religious, familial) that define “right” and “wrong”;
- The ability to foresee and weigh the consequences of decisions and actions;
- The courage to stand up for what one believes to be right, e.g., advocating for non-violent resolution of conflict;
- The desire to make a positive difference in the world;
- The awareness of and ability to manage one's emotions to facilitate healthy relationships and positive self-development.

In striving to foster Ethical Leadership and fulfill its civic-minded mission, Moses Brown has developed the following guidelines for school-based discourse, debate, political education, and civic engagement.

Guidelines for Discourse

Robust intellectual discourse happens in all divisions at Moses Brown, often centered around issues of social justice. From conversations about the first Thanksgiving in Third Grade, to the Racial Justice unit in Seventh Grade, and myriad electives in Upper School such as Contemporary Ethics or Civilizing America: Literature and Legality of Race, MB students learn to engage in thoughtful, respectful dialogue about complex topics. Our advisory program, together with Meeting for Worship, also provides opportunity for students to reflect on current events and social issues.

The following community agreements* guide educational discussions among students and faculty at MB:

Honor confidentiality

- What gets said in the group, stays in the group.

Stay engaged

- Be open to the unfamiliar rather than defending your current beliefs. Listen deeply to others.

Speak your Truth

- Speak your thoughts honestly. Make “I” the subject of your statements, instead of “you” or “they.”

Practice Both-And Thinking

- Consider that multiple perspectives can be valid at the same time; complex issues are rarely either-or in nature.

Attend to Intention and Impact

- Seek to understand how your words impact others, rather than defending your intentions.

Expect and Accept Non-Closure

- Rather than seeking a quick solution or resolution, focus on a commitment to ongoing dialogue.

Share the air and make room for all to participate

- Balance contributions from all participants.

Recognize and value the humanity in others

- Do not propagate speech or ideas that dehumanize, degrade or demean the race or color, religion, sex, ability or disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or national origin of others.

Actively embracing these standards during discussion promotes freedom of expression and diversity of thought while upholding our Quaker principle of respecting and valuing all.

Guidelines for Political Expression and Activism

As a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, Moses Brown as an institution cannot participate in political campaigns or make statements in favor of or opposed to candidates for elective office. However, it can and does strive to foster civic-mindedness within the school community. A natural byproduct of teaching and learning in a Friends school is a desire to engage in political and social expression and activism. Such expression and activism can take many forms, e.g., supporting a particular organization, piece of legislation or political candidate, starting or signing a petition, or participating in a protest etc.

The school understands and respects that students, faculty and staff may choose to express their activism by wearing clothing or buttons, placing stickers on cars, laptops or water bottles, displaying yard signs, flags or posters, and posting social media messages that convey political and social views. Moses Brown requires that all students, faculty and staff adhere to the following guidelines when expressing their political and social views at school, at school events or on social media:

- Do not use images or text that include derogatory references to race, religion, sex, ability or disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or national origin.
- Seek the guidance of an administrator (e.g., Division Head, Director of Student Life, Head of School) before:
 - Hosting an event or awareness campaign that takes places on campus or is connected to the school in any way;
 - Posting signs on campus;
 - Participating in a walk-out or protest that occurs during the school day.
- Be prepared to engage in open and honest dialogue with those who may disagree with political and social views expressed at school or on social media, regardless of their intent.
- Adults at MB should be aware that differences of knowledge and authority (e.g., between teachers and students, or between administrators and other employees) can complicate a free exchange of views; because positional power can sometimes make dissenting uncomfortable for others, those with authority should be careful not to unintentionally impose political views on others. In this context, we believe that upholding the school's Quaker values is appropriate at all times and not political.
- Students, faculty and staff should refer to divisional student manuals and employee manuals which expand on community expectations and responses to violations of those expectations.

Our Commitment to Fighting Injustice

The school recognizes that elected officials at the local, state and federal level do not always act in accordance with our values as a Friends school. While the school respects any individual's right to advocate for a position or candidate of their choice, the school will not allow speech on campus or at school events that contravenes the school's foundational values. Moses Brown stands against cases of discrimination and hateful acts toward race, religion, sex, ability or disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or national origin. Additionally, Moses Brown is committed to ensuring that all members of the school community, regardless of identity, feel seen, heard and loved on our campus.

This document was inspired by, "Sample Guidelines for Civic Engagement and the School Environment" by The Glasgow Group LLC.

*Some agreements adapted from: Singleton, G.E. & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous Conversations about Race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.