Feb. 1, 2021

Dear All,

A short time ago I sent the community a note about our expectations for civil discourse. You have all done a great job meeting those expectations so far, and now we are going to begin our recognition of Black History Month, which starts today, by learning more about how civil discourse works and practicing it as an academic community.

Often the first step in any meaningful discussion is to understand how others define the words they use, especially when the discussion is between people with different perspectives. It is critical to know what someone *means* when they use central words or phrases. This may seem trivial at first, but it is actually at the heart of civil discourse. Without a common understanding of terms, how we use them and what they mean to all involved in the discussion, civil discourse is just not possible. For example, two people may have varying ideas about what words like *equity* or *justice* actually mean and how they are applied. Without a common understanding, the discussion will not be effective.

This is about common understanding, not necessarily common agreement. However, if we know *how* someone else understands something, we can then communicate with them in a way they are more likely to *hear* what *we* are saying the way we intend it. This common understanding is the foundation of civil discourse.

To help demonstrate this point and to bring the process into action, we will hold a WMA Community Forum on each of the four Sundays in February. This will be an opportunity to observe and practice engaging in civil discourse as a school, with each Forum centered around one guiding question intended to increase understanding. Because it is Black History Month, these guiding questions will revolve around issues of black history, civil rights and racial equity. For the first forum this coming Sunday, February 7, we will be guided by the question - What is the meaning of the phrase Black Lives Matter?

Details will follow. I hope to see you at the Forum, and I hope you have a wonderful week.

Brian P. Easler

Head of School