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The Election is Over... Now What?



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After any election, it's important to remember that our civic duty does not end at the ballot box. No matter who we supported or voted for, we need to continue to make our voices heard, hold our elected officials accountable and press on issues that are important to us. While elected officials have a great deal of power—whether they are members of Congress, state or local legislators, Governors, Mayors or Presidents—in a democracy, the people also have collective power to hold our government and elected officials accountable for the decisions they make and the issues they tackle.

Classroom teachers can continue the conversation about the election by engaging students in a discussion about the candidates and help students express their thoughts by writing letters to their newly elected officials.

Review or Establish Classroom Guidelines

Because there will likely be differences of opinion and strong feelings about the outcome of an election, this is a good time to review classroom guidelines or rules, if you have already created them. If not, take 15–20 minutes to establish classroom guidelines. Make sure that at the minimum, the following guidelines are among the list and that each are explained and agreed upon:

- Respect others' feelings and points of view.
- Speak from your own personal experience and don't speak for others.
- Do not judge the feelings and thoughts of others.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Share "air time" so one person doesn't monopolize the discussion.
- Agree to disagree if you cannot find common ground.

As an additional resource, use [Establishing a Safe Learning Environment](#) for this process.

Discuss Your Thoughts about the Candidate

Decide which candidate/newly elected official to focus on and engage students in a discussion about that person. You can do this by having an open-ended discussion and ask students: *When you heard the results of the election, what did you think and how did you feel?* Then, distribute index cards to students and have them write on one side, one thought they have about the election or candidate (in a sentence or two) and on the other side, one question they have about the election or candidate (in a sentence or two). Remind students that they should say what they think but also be respectful and not insult anyone in the class. Collect all the cards, mix them up and redistribute the cards so that students get a

different person's card. Have each student read both sides of the card (the thought and the question) in their hand aloud. Have students then turn and talk with the person sitting next to them, discussing what they heard by answering some or all of the following questions:

- Were you surprised by anything you heard?
- Did you hear a thought or question that you hadn't thought of before? Explain.
- Did you notice any patterns in people's thoughts and questions?

Write a letter

Engage students in a process that results in them writing a letter to the newly elected official. Start the discussion by asking: *How can we make a difference in keeping our government and elected officials accountable? How can we make sure they pay attention to our (their constituents) needs and pay attention to the issues that are important?* Explain that some of the ways they can do that include: keeping informed on issues, following the elected officials' voting patterns and legislation they promote, contacting them to express your support or disagreement on a particular issue, writing to elected officials to ask them to stand up to bias and hate rhetoric, engaging in local or national activism, voting, etc.

Explain to students that they are going to take one of those steps by writing a letter or email to the elected official to express their support, thoughts, hopes, disagreements or fears for what they do in the days ahead and during their time in office. If you haven't done so already, you can also have students discuss what they know and have learned about the candidate during the campaign.

To help students construct their letters, use the following questions as a guide for deciding what to include in their letters or download the [Letter to the Elected Official Worksheet](#). They can incorporate some or all of their responses to the following prompts:

- What I saw, heard and felt during the campaign that I support...
- What I saw, heard and felt during the campaign that I don't agree with...
- What I heard in your acceptance/victory speech that I appreciate...
- What I heard in your acceptance/victory speech that concerns me....
- What I look forward to during your time in office is...
- What 3-4 issues* I would like to see you address....
- Something else that is important for you to know...

*Possible Issues could include: hate crimes, health care, racial profiling, jobs, taxes, refugees, immigration, gun reform, in-state college tuition, voting rights, LGBTQ rights, social services, law enforcement, criminal justice system, climate change, gender pay gap, etc.

Encourage students to talk with their friends, parents and family members about their letters/emails. If time permits, have students conference with each other to revise the letters. Before sending the letter or email, the teacher should review and finalize the letters/emails. If sending via email, teachers should compile all the letters together and send to the elected official through their own email address. Use "[How to Contact Your Elected Officials](#)" or "[Find Your Representative](#)" to get contact information for elected officials.