



## Civil Discourse Implementation: Road Map and Checklist for Leaders

BY SARAH LANE

The road map and checklist recommendations outline progressive stages for implementing civil discourse practices and are adaptable to the specific needs and practices of your school. While there is suggested timing, pacing should be adjusted to fit your school's context, with flexibility to accelerate as opportunities arise. Although the categories follow a progression, it is natural to revisit earlier stages based on current needs. As new staff join, they may begin in the **Emerging** stage, and existing staff will benefit from periodically revisiting **Emerging** and **Expanding** practices. **Empowering** educators is a continuous process, supporting staff and students to lead and sustain civil discourse efforts over time.

The following road map is an example timeline and can be adapted to a school's needs and pacing.



**Months 0–2:** The **Emerging** stage focuses on building initial awareness and foundational steps for civil discourse among staff and stakeholders to begin integrating respectful dialogue into school culture.

**Months 2–6:** **Expanding** builds on this foundation by enhancing staff skills, using resources, and implementing practices across classrooms.

**Months 7–9:** **Empowering** aims to establish civil discourse as a core schoolwide norm, with students and staff actively leading initiatives and growth. The school community can become an example for others.

## Checklist

### EMERGING

- Develop your own awareness.** Read the [Principles of Civil Discourse Primer](#), and familiarize yourself with the AWARE framework. Engage in research and reading.
- Make connections.** Look at content standards and content. Take notes on where civil discourse overlaps with required standards, such as speaking and listening standards in English language arts, discourse in STEM, and foundational skills in social studies.
- Assess current practices.** Review existing school policies and classroom practices. Make a list of strengths and challenges within your school and community.
- Set goals.** Develop goals for increasing civil discourse strategies in your school and a long-term vision for schoolwide practice.
- Communicate the “why” to staff and share initial resources.** Share the value of civil discourse and your support for staff in having classroom spaces for discussion, understanding, and reflection. Provide [Sphere's Principles of Civil Discourse Primer](#), and highlight the AWARE framework.
- Encourage staff to start with low-stakes activities.** Activities and tools can be found in the [Middle School Toolkit](#), like these [discussion starters](#), or staff can use introductory lessons, such as “What Is Civil Discourse?” Request that staff consider or initiate a plan for developing classroom discussion norms.
- Share with stakeholders.** Articulate the purpose of civil discourse and its alignment with the school mission or vision with stakeholders. This could be in a newsletter, at an open house, or at family or community meetings.
- Invest in teacher relationships.** Support and empower teachers in this work. Listen to their feedback and be adaptive.

## EXPANDING

- **Highlight successes.** Share tools, resources, and highlights from across the school community. For example, a newsletter could share classroom norms being set in a class or discussion starters in action.
- **Build staff capacity through professional learning.** Offer space to share what is working well, and gain feedback and ideas. Provide collaboration time to build civil discourse practices into planning. [Sphere on the Road](#) can also provide professional development, at no cost to you.
- **Model practices.** Incorporate civil discourse into staff meetings, decision-making processes, and school events. This could include modeling unique [civil discourse strategies](#).
- **Pilot a coaching cycle.** With a teacher interested in collaboration, try a high-impact coaching cycle. This can include collaborative planning, co-teaching, and reflection on lessons that embed civil discourse strategies. Try out a [walk-through tool](#) or [single-point rubric](#).
- **Provide teachers with a goal-setting template for civil discourse.** A goal-setting [template](#) can be used as a private reflection piece to guide their thinking and planning with their learning so far.
- **Begin collecting data and refining the implementation process.** This could include feedback from teachers on processes so far, qualitative and quantitative student data from engagement in civil discourse, or other evaluation tools.
- **Advocate for civil discourse and address concerns promptly.** Support students and staff with challenges and potential barriers to diverse perspectives.
- **Leverage technology.** Examples include using student discussion boards or providing teachers with recording tools to record and reflect on student discussions.
- **Collect feedback and make necessary changes.** Staff surveys and an open-door policy can support a flow of information to make in-the-moment changes.

## EMPOWERING

- **Support peer walk-throughs.** Colleagues can use the [walk-through tool](#) or [single-point rubric](#) to support reflective practice and learn from one another.
- **Support wider use of goal-setting practices.** Embed intentional reflection at key points in the year. Couple this with revisiting key principles and strategies.
- **Promotion and sharing of strategies by teachers.** Teachers can share an approach and its implementation during meetings, lead professional development sessions or discussions, or post resources in a shared digital space.
- **Establish schoolwide norms.** Collaboratively develop and consistently reinforce schoolwide norms for civil discourse that align with the school's mission and values.

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- ❑ **Create student leadership opportunities.** Encourage students to lead civil discourse initiatives, such as hosting forums, peer mediation programs, or discussion clubs.
  - ❑ **Encourage family and community engagement.** Town halls or family workshops could be organized. Share civil discourse implementation stories in a newsletter.
  - ❑ **Sustain efforts.** Regularly review progress, provide ongoing training, and refine practices to ensure that civil discourse remains a core component of school culture.
  - ❑ **Review your goals and assess current realities.** Which goals have been achieved? Where are updates needed? What strengths and needs exist now? Revise and adjust.
  - ❑ **Amplify your efforts.** Share your work with other school leaders, district leadership, or others in your network to increase impact and awareness.