



Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee

Building a Loving Community from the Ground Up

lrsjcommittee.weebly.com

Back to School Tips from the Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee

The first days of school offer the opportunity to show all children that they are treasured members of our schools and classrooms. By taking steps to create respectful, affirming environments, we can set the tone for a positive classroom culture that will enhance our children's education throughout the year.

Tips for the first days of school:

- **Minimize gender bias.** Avoid splitting children into boys and girls lines and call students "students" or "children" rather than "boys and girls. When you need to split children into teams or groups, look for creative ways to split the class (e.g. students with more/fewer than 5 buttons, students wearing primary colors, students with/without shoelaces, students who have birthdays between January and June, etc.). Remind children that there are many ways people express ourselves, and interrupt conversations about what "boys do" or "girls do."
- **Celebrate multilingualism.** Many children speak more than one language at home, or have family members who speak multiple languages. *In Ladera Ranch alone, our K-8 students speak Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Farsi, Filipino, French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Turkish, Russian, & Vietnamese, among others!* Invite children to teach each other simple phrases (hello, welcome, school, nice to meet you, etc.) in any languages they know. Teachers can write these phrases on bulletin boards as visible reminders of the linguistic assets of the class, and prepare monolingual children for future language education.
- **Welcome diverse families.** Invite children to bring in pictures of themselves with their families, and create a bulletin board featuring the people who support and care for your students. In early grades, teachers might link this with the creation of a class family book (in the style of Todd Parr's "The Family Book" or a similar grade-level text); in older grades, these activities can lay the foundation for standards-aligned discussions of family diversity.
- **Prepare everyone to address discriminatory language and incidents.** Parent volunteers are a tremendous asset in our classrooms, but don't always have training in child development or multicultural education. If you have parent volunteers in your classroom, have a conversation with them about how to avoid bias, address disrespectful or discriminatory language, and respond to incidents of name calling or teasing.

As the year progresses:

- **Remind students of your classroom and school values.** Be aware of the ways current events impact students. In times of political strife, children don't always know how to make sense of things they see on the media. Some students may be scared or angry, while others may say things that don't reflect your school's commitment to building a welcoming community for all students. Actively and directly address any disrespectful or discriminatory words or actions. Need more resources? Check out Teaching Tolerance's guide for [Responding to Hate and Bias at School](#).
- **Help students build relationships across social lines.** On October 6th, schools across the globe celebrate [Mix it Up at Lunch Day](#) to give children an opportunity to make new friends and learn about each other. Visit the website for details and resources!
- **Celebrate diversity in children's literature.** Create choice reading activities where students are challenged to find a work of fiction with a main character who is different than them (in terms of country of origin, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.). Invite students to make Venn diagrams comparing and contrasting their lives with those in books.
- **Expand students' worldview.** Not all families have the same religious beliefs and traditions. Review classroom materials, handouts, and concert programs to make sure they don't assume children share a religious background, eat similar holiday foods, or give and receive presents at the same times of year. If you do teach about holidays, take advantage of the opportunity to [teach about the different types of holidays celebrated around the world](#), and invite students to talk about the celebrations most important in their own family.
- **Learn about diversity within and beyond our community.** The California Department of Education publishes [data](#) about linguistic, ethnic, and racial diversity within individual schools and throughout the region, and local museums feature artwork and exhibits about the many communities that comprise Southern California.

There are many places to find **free lesson plans and resources** related to creating a welcoming environment for all students, building an inclusive classroom library, and addressing hate speech or bullying within or beyond the classroom. Here are some of our favorites:

- **GLSEN** (<https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources/lesson-plans>)
- **Rethinking Schools** (www.rethinkingschools.org)
- **Teaching for Change: Anti-Bias Education** (<https://www.teachingforchange.org/teacher-resources/anti-bias-education>)
- **Teaching Tolerance** (www.tolerance.org)

The Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee is a collective of more than 350 households in Ladera Ranch. We strive to support schools, teachers, and libraries in developing curriculum and policies that include and engage all students, promote critical thinking, and prepare children to interact effectively in our diverse global world. To learn more about us, visit our website at lrsjcommittee.weebly.com