

# Magic Valley Commonwealth School

*Magic Valley Commonwealth School assists parents in bringing like-minded youth together to experience a leadership education as they prepare for a mission-driven future of public and private service.*

## Mentor expectations

Dear Mentors,

Thank you for your willingness to mentor in the Magic Valley Commonwealth School. As the School Board, we are confident that this experience can be a very rewarding and uplifting experience that can make a positive impact on your life and the lives of those you will mentor. Following are some guidelines and expectations to help ensure this is the case.

- Remember that the mission of the School is focused on the children, helping them receive a “leadership education.”
- Always follow our Bylaws and the Safe Sanctuary Policy of the Methodist Church (posted on our website), which includes having two-deep adult leadership at all times.
- Be sure to come prepared to class. If you are unable to attend, please notify your co-mentor, and a member of the Board (typically the mentor liaison). Please also find a substitute to take your place
- You will be most effective as you help the students discuss and discover as they learn. Avoid lecturing or dominating the discussion.
- We are all free to have opinions, including about politics and the government, but we must refrain from expressing disparaging opinions about our government or its leaders; or of people, groups, religions or races, etc.

## Mentor Mentoring

### One key to effective mentoring: asking questions and generating discussion

*(Note: you may substitute the word “mentor” for the word “teacher” in the following document)*

Asking effective questions is one of the most important skills a teacher can develop. Questions can engage students in the process of understanding and help them identify and understand important principles.

It is worth great effort to carefully craft questions during lesson preparation that will lead to understanding and engage the minds and hearts of the students as they learn. When planning questions, a teacher should first determine the purpose for which they are asking a particular question. The teacher should then thoughtfully design the question with that purpose in mind. A few carefully chosen words can make a great difference in whether or not a question results in the desired outcome.

Teachers should strive to prepare and ask questions that stimulate thinking and feeling. They should generally avoid questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no,” or where the answer is so obvious that the students are not motivated to think about it. Teachers should also avoid questions that could spark controversy.\*

When asking questions in class, it is important for teachers to give students time to think about their response. Sometimes teachers ask a question, pause for a second or two, and then when no one immediately responds, panic and give the answer themselves. Effective questions, however, often require thought and reflection, and students may need time to find the answer in their study materials or to formulate a meaningful answer. On occasion it can be helpful to give students time to write down their answer before responding.

While there is a wide variety of questions a teacher may ask, there are four general types of questions that are particularly important in this type of teaching and learning:

1. Questions that invite students to search for information
2. Questions that lead students to analyze for understanding
3. Questions that invite feelings and ideas
4. Questions that encourage application

Meaningful class discussions play a vital role in teaching and learning. A class discussion occurs as teachers verbally interact with students and students verbally interact with each other in a manner that fosters learning. A good discussion can help students learn the significance of seeking answers to important questions and the value of listening to and learning from the comments, ideas, and experiences of others. It can also help students maintain a level of concentration and participation in class that often results in a deeper understanding of the principles being discussed, as well as a more genuine desire in their hearts to apply the things they learn and feel.

Following are some ideas to help teachers direct engaging and inspiring class discussions:

**Plan the discussion.** Like other methods of teaching, a discussion needs to be carefully prepared and then conducted. The teacher needs to have thought how the discussion will help students understand what they need to learn, what series of questions will lead to that purpose, how to ask those questions in the most effective manner, and how to respond if a student's answer leads the discussion in an unanticipated direction.

Avoid wandering off on long tangents ("completely different lines of thought"). Your classroom time is limited, and digressing into unrelated topics can not only confuse students but cut into that valuable time. Preparation is one key to help avoid tangents. Prepare in order to ensure that the things you will discuss are pertinent to the main topic. This can require mentor restraint.

**Avoid excessive teacher commentary.** Teachers who comment excessively on a discussion topic may discourage students from making the effort to participate because they have learned that their teacher is often anxious to provide the answer. Excessive teacher commentary can make students feel that their contributions are less valuable and cause them to lose interest.

If you have been talking for more than 2-3 minutes, it may be time for you to pause and stop speaking. It may be appropriate to either ask a question or give someone else a chance to speak.

**Invite all students to participate.** Teachers should strive to find ways to appropriately invite all students to participate in meaningful discussions, even those who are hesitant to participate for various reasons. Teachers should be careful not to embarrass students by calling on them when they know the student is unprepared to answer.

Sometimes a student or a small number of students tend to dominate class discussion. Teachers may need to visit privately with such individuals, thank them for their willingness to participate, express how important it is to encourage all class members to participate, and explain why they may not be called upon each time they volunteer to respond.

**Call on students by name.** Calling on students by name to respond to a question or make a comment helps foster a learning environment of love and respect.

**Don't be afraid of silence.** Sometimes when asked an effective question, students may not immediately respond. This silence should not trouble the teacher if it does not go on too long. At times, students need an opportunity to reflect on what they have been asked and how they might respond to the question.

**Rephrase the question.** At times students may struggle to respond to a question because the question is not clear. The teacher may need to rephrase the question or ask the students if they understand what was asked. Teachers should avoid asking a series of questions in succession without allowing students adequate time to think deeply enough to formulate appropriate responses.

**Listen carefully and ask follow-up questions.** Teachers are sometimes so concerned about what to say or do next that they do not pay attention to what students are saying. By observing and listening carefully to students, teachers can discern their needs and guide the discussion. Teachers can make sure they understand the students' answers by asking questions like "Can you help me understand what you mean by that?" or "Can you give me an example of what you mean?" Asking such follow-up questions will often invite a student to share more of what they are thinking and. Teachers should remind students to listen to each other as well and not to talk when someone else is speaking.

It is crucial for teachers to set the example here. Do not interrupt or talk over people when they are speaking.

**Redirect student's comments or questions.** Many times class discussions follow a pattern where a teacher asks a question, a student responds, and then the teacher adds his or her insight to the student's answer before asking the next question. Discussions can become much more meaningful, lively, and effective when a teacher redirects an answer or comment from one student to other students. Simple questions like "What would you add to that?" or "What are your thoughts on that comment?" can create a pattern where students respond to students. This often greatly enhances the learning experience. Usually, unless time is limited, all students who desire to make a comment should have an opportunity to speak.

**Acknowledge the response in a positive manner.** When a student gives a response, the teacher needs to acknowledge it in some way. This can be a simple "thank you" or a comment about the answer. When an incorrect response is given, the teacher needs to be careful not to embarrass the student. An effective teacher can build on a part of the student's comment that is correct or ask a follow-up question that allows a student to rethink his or her response.