

# QUALITY ACADEMIC DISCUSSIONS

## DEFINITION

### **Quality academic discussions:**

- are purposeful, sustained conversations about content
- require students to work together to co-construct knowledge and negotiate meaning in order to attain high levels of thinking and deep understanding about a topic
- are characterized by high student engagement and participation, as students discuss relevant topics that allow for multiple and diverse perspectives

### **Quality academic discussions are NOT:**

- used for fact checking or procedures
- limited to unstructured group work, Think-Pair-Share, or Turn and Talk

There are **whole-class**, **small group**, and **paired structures** for academic discussions, each having important and distinct purposes and benefits for student learning. According to Cathy O'Connor, professor at Boston University School of Education and author of Classroom Discussions, academic discussions are important because they support students in achieving four goals:

1. Help Individual Students Share Their Own Thoughts
2. Help Students Orient to and Listen Carefully to One Another
3. Help Students Deepen Their Reasoning
4. Help Students Engage with Others' Reasoning
5. Help Students Develop and Demonstrate Competencies of the Essential Communicator as described by the OUSD Graduate Profile
6. Help students develop academic language and concepts
7. Help students develop social and emotional learning competencies including collaboration, risk-taking, and social skills

### **What are the OUSD district -wide patterns?**

By analyzing the data that emerged from every elementary, middle, and high school from our Fall Instructional Rounds the Instruction, Leadership, and Equity (ILE) team of Executive Officers was able to surface some district wide patterns. The data suggested that the majority of our schools have the conditions in place to foster quality academic discussion. Small group and paired conversations amongst students have become a norm and students are engaging in these structures smoothly. Teachers are making a dedicated effort to provide these opportunities. Every school is aware of our focus on academic discussion and there is a range of teaching expertise in this area. For the fall we did not see many examples of students engaged in the type of academic discussion that can push their thinking and grow their content knowledge. Mostly observed were students sharing their answers in a group or pairs without probing or further thinking from their peers. Additionally we didn't see teachers providing the right prompts to inspire engaging conversations or a clear purpose of how a discussion amongst students was connecting to the larger learning goal and purpose.