

# Majority Vote Is Not Necessarily Consensus

## Group Activity

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1. Write your own definition of the following:

Majority: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Consensus: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Share your definition in your small group.

3. Work together to develop a definition that incorporates elements of each person's definition:

Majority: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Consensus: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Be prepared to present your definition to the large group and consider amendments.

Majority: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Consensus: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Discussion

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### What does MAJORITY mean?

**ma-jor-i-ty** 1. The greater number or part; a number more than half of the total 2. The amount by which the greater number of votes cast, as in an election, exceeds the total number of remaining votes.

### What does CONSENSUS mean?

**con-sen-sus** 1. an opinion or position reached by a group as a whole or by majority will.  
2. General agreement or accord

Discuss what the difference is.

### Why it's consensus and not majority rule.....

“Consensus is a cooperative effort to find a sound solution acceptable to everyone, rather than a competitive struggle in which an unacceptable solution is forced on other.” *Thomas Kayser, Building Team Power*

### Voting tends to generate the following thoughts from people:

- I am all for the idea
- I am willing to provide support
- I would rather not support it

### Steps to Consensus:

1. Discuss each problem, raise questions, present arguments for and against, generate as many options for a solution as possible, and consider realistic options for solution.
2. Explore differences and similarities, agreements and disagreements, between and among the problems.
3. Make suggestions for combining similar problems or modifying problems.
4. Generate a new problem based on the discussion.
5. Apply the following criteria to the problem under consideration:
  - a. Does government have the responsibility or authority to act on the problem?
  - b. Can the problem be addressed with a single policy?
  - c. Is it reasonable to believe that a policy can, or should be written to resolve the problem?
  - d. Is the problem important to young people, or does it have a direct or indirect impact on them?
  - e. Will it be possible to find enough information to work on the problem?

### When there is no consensus – Alternatives

1. Create a compromise problem and ask everyone to react.
2. Provide individual reflection time and then begin discussion of the problem(s) again.
3. Organize small groups to reach consensus and then begin large group discussion again.
4. Refocus the discussion, identify real concerns, and reframe the problem.

### True consensus comes when...

1. You create an environment that encourages and supports rational discussion of ideas.
2. Students are allowed to voice diversified opinions and explore different perspectives.
3. Students are not coerced by strong individuals or the teacher.
4. There is a process to combine the different opinions into a final consensus while allowing room for disagreement and differences of opinion.