

## Democracy is the Freedom to Choose

We are so fortunate to live in the world's leading democracy. Every day we hear about our country's shortcomings, but those criticisms are simply a statement about the high standard we hold in the United States for our freedom. We have led the world for almost 400 years in the creation of a democratic government and most of the world's nations strive to be like us.

Every four years we have an excellent opportunity to teach our children about what democracy is and how it works. It is a great time to point out how every adult citizen in our country can vote, how we organize into political parties, how we choose our leaders and our representatives at all levels of government. We have a great opportunity to teach our children that *Democracy is the Freedom to Choose*.

It is also a good time to teach our children that while *Democracy* is built around *Freedom* - it is not free. The **Smart Character Choices** program attempts to teach young people that with the *freedom to choose* comes **responsibility**. In a democracy, responsibility is evidenced through our **kindness** toward others and **getting along** with each other, two important characteristics that lead to the inclusion of all citizens and the desire to work together to solve problems. We can't complete the enormous task of securing freedom without an abiding **respect** for each other and a committed **work ethic** that pledges our efforts to complete the task. And finally, **optimism** is so central to democracy because without it our founding fathers, our leaders and our citizens could not have *imagined* living in a free society.

We chose this theme because we believe the election this year is an historic and important one for our children to remember. For the first time in our history we have broken barriers and extended freedom and choice. The presidential race features the first ever African American as a major party candidate. He faces the traditional mature white male and former soldier we have seen repeatedly, but by his side is a young woman. No matter who wins the election this year, we will have taken a step forward in presidential politics.

***Democracy is the Freedom to Choose*** as our theme this year gives us many opportunities to talk with our students about the ideas that are so critical to our country today and in the future as we work together to create and assure democracy. I encourage you to join us and talk with your children about these important topics.

