
Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

Position Statement on Culturally Responsive Education

May 4, 2011

Culturally responsive education supports students in developing a lifelong appreciation for understanding and valuing cultural understanding in all settings of life. The incorporation of culturally responsive education as a critical component of all current curriculum, activities and services is a mainstream pedagogical practice that can serve to improve the academic lives of all students.

Connecticut's public schools are plagued with persistent achievement gaps between wealthy and poor students and between white students and students of color despite numerous initiatives to break this cycle. Recognizing that the school population is becoming increasingly diverse and that the nations of the world have become all the more interdependent, the Connecticut State Board of Education supports and affirms the importance of a culturally responsive education for all students.

A study of the research on effective educational strategies points us toward a theory of teaching and learning that addresses the important role of knowing and understanding the culture of our students and using such knowledge to inform curriculum development and teaching methodologies. This body of knowledge, known as culturally responsive education, will also better prepare all students to enter a diverse workforce and compete for jobs with their counterparts in a global economy. Opportunities are needed to examine personal biases, gain understanding of the complex life issues faced by others, and to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to work with and live alongside others from different cultural backgrounds. The theoretical foundation of culturally responsive education acknowledges that one of the key factors influencing poor student achievement among students of color is the cultural incongruity between the school and the home. This combined with a further cultural mismatch between teaching styles and curriculum, and that of the culture and learning styles of students of color, leads to a failure to engage students effectively.

Culturally responsive education is a teaching approach that helps students use their cultural backgrounds to aid in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Culturally responsive teachers use culturally relevant instructional material, affirm student cultural identities, and use cultural backgrounds as a knowledge base for learning and academic success. Further, family involvement and community partnerships are encouraged. While helping to close the achievement/opportunity gaps, culturally responsive education also helps fight racism and other forms of discrimination, bias and oppression. Through this process all students can become skilled at working within a diverse world. Early and frequent interactions with students from different cultures, ethnicities, religions and other forms of differences, as well as learning the beliefs, values, customs and perspectives of others, should be a natural part of the curriculum.

The Connecticut State Board of Education acknowledges that sufficient, specialized and appropriate resources must be provided to close the achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing students, males and females, and students of different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. To close the gaps, schools must provide high-quality, academically-focused extended learning opportunities to refine and strengthen students' skills. Culturally responsive education can help meet these needs.

America is one of the most multicultural of all nations. A society rich with a variety of cultures, contributions, perspectives, assets and strengths adds to the ongoing grand experiment envisioned by the

founders of this country; a democracy based on many coming together as one. Americans succeed, not when we ignore differences, but when we embrace them. Our diversity is our strength.

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Guidelines for Policymakers

January 17, 2012

The Connecticut State Board of Education (CSDE) provides the following guidelines to support collaboration among the state's various stakeholders to build high-quality, comprehensive, coordinated and culturally responsive education programming in the state.

Connecticut State Department of Education's Responsibilities:

Develop and promote a comprehensive, statewide program to implement Culturally Responsive Education in schools as a means to increase student achievement and student engagement.

- Provide resources and technical assistance to school districts to help implement a Culturally Responsive Education, in accordance with this policy statement. This leadership includes promoting strong student and family engagement and the full involvement of all major partners.
- Provide professional development to train educators and highlight best practices in Culturally Responsive Education.
- Employ highly qualified, experienced educators as departmental curriculum consultants and program managers who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of our student body, and who are knowledgeable about culturally responsive education content, methods and pedagogy, including culturally responsive diagnosis, measurement and assessment.
- Take leadership in guiding statewide efforts to increase recruitment and retention of teachers of color.
- To ensure a safe school climate, designate State Department of Education staff, to the extent of its authority, to provide oversight and technical assistance to create positive school climates and anti-bullying practices that are consistent with state and federal civil rights laws and bullying legislation.

School District Responsibilities Pre-Kindergarten-12:

Create a culture of value and support for the meaningful discussion of culture throughout all schools.

- Develop and implement policies and procedures that assist teachers and administrators in creating Culturally Responsive Education learning environments that address every student's needs.
- Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students.
- Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.
- Provide safe and effective learning environments to discuss cultural differences, such as race, religion and national origin at all grade levels.
- Promote efforts to improve school climate as a critical component for effective learning and school reform.

- Employ highly qualified teachers who are knowledgeable about culturally responsive education content, methods and pedagogy, including culturally responsive diagnosis, measurement and assessment.
- Implement high-quality, culturally responsive prekindergarten-12 curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state expectations.
- Review all disciplinary policies to ensure that they encourage students to stay in school rather than excluding them from school.
- Ensure full compliance with state bullying laws and all state and federal civil-rights legislation.
- Provide leadership to lead districtwide efforts to increase recruitment and retention of teachers of color.
- Collaborate with all families, with particular outreach to culturally diverse families in the development of curriculum, instructional methods and expectations for student learning.
- Encourage community participation in events during and beyond the school day which promote the importance of culturally responsive education.
- Provide appropriate resources for a broad array of extra-curricular programs to maximize the number of students involved and connected to school in constructive, adult-supervised activities (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning, and peer mentoring).

School Responsibilities:

Require the development of Culturally Responsive Education strategies and methods that lead towards cultural competency across all content areas supporting skills needed in a global workforce.

- Implement a system of support for all students that include supplemental and intensive education about and in response to cultural backgrounds.
- Demonstrate a respect for students' identities and welcome a diverse community to participate in schools.
- Acknowledge and respond to students' diverse learning styles.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in activities (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning and peer mentoring) that promote a school climate for learning about different cultures.
- Provide an environment rich in culture of all forms, from teaching materials to teaching strategies in all school curricula and classrooms.
- Work with and support families to identify and address their critical role to assist in providing a culturally responsive learning environment.
- Invite parents and other community members into schools to share their home cultures with the school community.
- Increase sensitivity and understanding of the process of second language acquisition that students experience by encouraging teachers to learn a new language.
- Ensure that all professional opportunities are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Teachers/Staff Responsibilities:

Differentiate and individualize instruction to ensure the cultural learning needs of all students.

- Maintain high expectations for all students regardless of cultural background and experiences.
- Use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline.
- Help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases of researchers and textbook writers influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed.
- Use cooperative and independent learning strategies to maximize classroom learning. Students are encouraged to work with other students on research projects and assignments that are both culturally and socially relevant.
- Participate in professional development activities that incorporate the cultural concerns of all school community members.
- Determine students' prior knowledge to ensure that content instruction is at an appropriate level of challenge and differentiated to meet their learning needs.
- Develop and organize coherent and relevant units, lessons and learning tasks that build on students' prior knowledge, skills and interests and engage students in the work of the discipline.
- Integrate learning activities that make real-world, career or global connections, and promote interdisciplinary connections whenever possible.
- Monitor student learning and adjust teaching during instruction in response to student performance and engagement in learning tasks.
- Provide meaningful, appropriate and specific feedback to students during instruction to improve their performance.
- Use research-based practices to honor all learning styles.
- Ensure that instruction is challenging, relevant and engaging for all students.
- Hold cultural sensitivity discussions with students, but especially when literary selections or references present negative stereotypes.
- Explicitly teach and role model important values, appropriate classroom behavior, respectful and appropriate treatment of others.
- Focus attention on students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds, which are also at the most risk of failing, to become empowered "intellectual leaders" in the classroom.
- Recognize that the culture of students of color may differ dramatically with the classroom and school.
- Create a class climate that is responsive to and respectful of the learning needs of students with diverse backgrounds, interests and performance levels.
- Treat students as individuals while recognizing that identification with their cultural group is often an evolving process.
- Teach the importance of all students in developing cultural competence.
- Acknowledge and utilize students' true-life experiences as legitimate parts of the curriculum.
- Plan and implement instruction that support student culture and educate all students about cultural concepts.
- Develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experience to effectively connect their culturally- and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences.
- Vary teaching approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles and language proficiency.

- Develop a repertoire of strategies that will meet the needs of and support the learning process for English Language Learners in their mainstream classes.
- Stay current on content and pedagogy related to Culturally Responsive Education and multicultural education.
- Provide varied assessments and use the results to inform instruction.
- Collaborate with peers to improve Culturally Responsive Education for all students.
- Foster more systematic and appropriate use of culture to enhance instruction.
- Engage and support families in fostering children's cultural awareness and development and seek input from families to make meaningful connections to students' lives.
- Help students develop a sense of civic responsibility toward their immediate community, the nation, and the world.

Higher Education Responsibilities:

Prepare teachers to work with diverse students and prepare all students for a global society.

- Ensure pre-service teachers are provided with course work in English as a second language acquisition and culturally responsive instructional practices.
- Research and develop programs to increase the number of minority teacher candidates and provide pre-service teachers with rigorous coursework in culturally responsive education across the content areas.
- Partner with CSDE and school districts in providing professional development in research-based strategies in culturally responsive education.
- Provide rigorous culturally responsive teacher education programs, linked to national and state standards, with depth and breadth to scientifically-based content and pedagogy, including cultural diversity and cognitive learning style theory and research.
- Develop ongoing, systematic partnerships with schools to support and enhance culturally responsive education programming.

Family and Community Responsibilities:

Work with the school to support children's cultural learning across content areas.

- Teach children the importance of developing cultural competence.
- Proactively communicate in culturally respectful and sensitive ways with families in order to ensure their ongoing awareness of student progress and encourage opportunities to support their child's learning.
- Learn how one's race, gender and culture affect professional interactions with students, families and colleagues.
- Create a culture of college and career readiness. Collaborate with administrators and families in the development of individualized student success plans to address goal setting, personal and academic development, post-secondary and career exploration, and/or capstone projects.
- Respect the dignity of each family, its culture, customs, and beliefs.
- Teach children to respect the ethnic and racial diversity of others.
- Stimulate children's interest in culture by involving them in a variety of culturally-rich activities (e.g., conversations, songs, stories).
- Encourage children's interests in culture by engaging them in speaking about what they are learning at school and how it relates to daily life, especially promoting reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and presenting skills.
- Use community resources to support children's cultural development.

- Provide consistent care and model pro-social behaviors, set strong examples and correct inappropriate actions (e.g., resolving conflicts peacefully, demonstrating tolerance and respect for individual differences, and encouraging lifelong learning).
- Become involved and engaged in school programs, practices and activities.
- Communicate regularly with classroom teachers and other relevant school personnel.
- Volunteer at school as appropriate and allowable.
- Participate in collaborative school and family efforts and functions.
- Allow children to engage in conversation about the cultural climate experienced in his/her school.
- Seek out information regarding the cultural climate in the school district and ways in which you might support and enhance cultural competency in the schools.

Student Responsibilities: (as developmentally appropriate)

Engage in comprehensive efforts to learn about one's own cultural history and an understanding of how culture affects learning.

- Demonstrate a respect and understanding of individual differences and diversity and demonstrate respect toward others.
- Contribute to creating and sustaining culturally rich learning environments, such as sharing of your own culture and experiences,
- Observe the laws, rules, policies, and procedures of the classroom, school, district, community, state and nation.
- Serve as a positive role model toward others in school, at home, and in the wider community by living a life that demonstrates empathy, caring and compassion.
- Become actively involved in school activities in addition to academic requirements.
- Develop positive and meaningful relationships with peers and school personnel.
- Begin developing the positive attitudes and skills necessary for entering a diverse, global workforce.
- Learn to speak another language.

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