

# Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

## Position Statement on Culturally Responsive Education

Revised December 2020

*Adopted on February 3, 2021*

The Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) reaffirms its commitment to improving the academic lives of Connecticut's growing diverse body of students by updating its position statement on Culturally Responsive Education. This position statement reflects the Board's ongoing understanding of the importance of culturally responsive education as a critical component of all curriculum, activities, and services.

A recently released joint statement from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, and the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, made clear the Board's commitment to equity:

"[The joint statement]... emphasized our mutual commitment to providing all students with school environments 'where they do not feel threatened regardless of their race, gender, gender identity or expression, religion, nationality, status of citizenship, or sexual orientation. It is our core responsibility as educators to do everything we can to foster environments that ensure equity, diversity and inclusion.'"

"Educators need to be self-reflective so we are not blind to discrimination, inequity, racism, implicit bias, and white privilege. Only by addressing these issues head-on, providing professional learning for all staff, explicit engagement of students and families, and having courageous conversations, will we make positive progress and create truly equitable schools."

The Connecticut State Board of Education supports and affirms the importance of a culturally responsive education for all students. Moreover, the Board will continue supporting and promoting comprehensive culturally responsive programs that implement anti-bias and racially conscious education. Such programs must account for students whose identity is not always represented as part of the mainstream curriculum, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender.

The Connecticut State Board of Education understands that culturally responsive educators become conduits of learning by affirming their content expertise through their own identities. As a result, the learning environment establishes a reciprocal relationship of respect between the educator and the students; thus, cultural backgrounds become the foundation of the knowledge base for learning and academic success. The SBE also understands that family engagement and community partnerships are necessary to help close the historically persistent gaps that have threatened our students' success for generations. Under such empowering learning conditions, culturally responsive education leverages critical inquiry to formulate approaches against racism, discrimination, bias, and oppression.

The guidelines that accompany this statement serve as fundamental markers, guided by the above principles, to create a learning environment that values the contributions of our diverse learning communities.

# **Position Statement on a Culturally Responsive Approach to Education**

## **Guidelines for Policymakers**

The Connecticut State Board of Education 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.

### **CT State Department of Education Responsibilities**

The Connecticut State Department of Education provides leadership that acknowledges the importance of creating systemic coherence driven by student success. This leadership includes promoting strong student engagement and committed involvement of all major partners. For example:

- Providing resources and technical assistance to school districts to help implement a Culturally Responsive Education, in accordance with this position statement.
- Providing professional development to train, support, and guide educators and highlight best practices in Culturally Responsive Education.
- Employing highly qualified, experienced educators 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 standards, measurement and assessment.
- Leading statewide efforts to increase recruitment, hiring and retention of teachers of color.
- Designating State Department of Education staff, to the extent of their 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 Expectations (Pre-Kindergarten-12)**

In collaboration with their Boards of Education, districts create an environment of value and support for the meaningful discussions of individuals' cultural contributions and assets throughout all schools. For example:

- Developing and implementing policies, procedures and curricula that assist teachers and administrators in creating learning environments of Culturally Responsive Education that affirm the students' identity and their sense of belonging, and provide them access to learning and the opportunity to grow.
- Recognizing, respecting and upholding the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and therefore treating students justly and considerately.
- Nurturing in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and others regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, ability, religion, or sexual orientation.
- Providing safe and effective learning environments to discuss cultural identities, such as race, religion and national origin at all grade levels.
- Promoting efforts to improve school climate as a critical component for effective learning and school reform.
- Employing highly qualified teachers who are knowledgeable about Culturally Responsive Education content, methods, and pedagogy, including culturally responsive standards, measurement and assessment.
- Reviewing all disciplinary policies and procedures through a culturally responsive lens.

- Providing leadership of district-wide efforts to increase recruitment and retention of teachers of color.
- Collaborating with all families, with particular outreach to culturally diverse families in the development of curriculum, instructional methods and expectations for student learning.
- Encouraging community participation in events during and beyond the school day that promote the importance and value of culturally responsive education.
- Providing appropriate resources for a broad array of extracurricular 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 Expectations**

Schools must require the development of Culturally Responsive Education strategies and methods across all content areas. For example:

- Demonstrating a respect for students' identities and welcome a diverse community to participate in schools.
- Providing opportunities for students to engage in activities (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning and peer mentoring) that broadens students' perspectives.
- Building authentic relationships with families through two-way, reciprocal conversations that acknowledge families' cultures as assets for teaching and learning, and invite families to be co-creators of a culturally responsive learning environment.
- Increasing understanding of second language acquisition and the importance of bi-literacy in student achievement by encouraging teachers to learn a new language.
- Ensuring that all professional development opportunities are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

### **Teachers/Staff Expectations**

Teachers should differentiate and individualize instruction by creating an environment of reciprocal respect and collaboration. For example:

- Partnering with students to 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.
- Using examples, images, and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline.
- Using 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.
- Holding cultural sensitivity discussions with students, especially when literary selections or references present negative stereotypes.
- Developing 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.
- Staying current on content and pedagogy related to Culturally Responsive Education.
- Collaborating with peers to improve Culturally Responsive Education for all students.

- Engaging and supporting families in fostering children’s cultural awareness and development and seeking input from families to make meaningful connections to students’ lives.
- Helping students develop a sense of civic responsibility toward their immediate community, the nation, and the world.
- Supporting students’ social emotional learning and understandings through appropriate programming as it relates to current topics surrounding racism, social justice and cultural competence.

### **Higher Education Expectations**

College and university education programs must prepare teachers to implement culturally relevant practices. For example:

- Ensuring pre-service teachers are provided with coursework in the history and contributions of all people of color to demonstrate their association with the experience of communities of color in Connecticut.
- Ensuring that pre-service teachers are provided with coursework in English as a second language acquisition and culturally responsive instructional practices.
- Researching and developing programs and practices to increase the number of teachers of color or other underrepresented candidates and providing pre-service teachers with rigorous coursework in culturally responsive education across the content areas.
- Partnering with CSDE and school districts in providing professional development in research-based and evidence-based strategies in Culturally Responsive Education.
- Providing 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.

### **Family and Community Expectations**

Families and community partners, such as organizations and faith leaders, businesses, and social service providers, work with the school to empower their children to use their histories and cultural identity as the foundation to learning. For example:

- Teaching children to respect the cultural diversity of others.
- Stimulating children’s interest in culture by involving them in a variety of culturally rich activities (e.g., conversations, songs, stories, exploring museum exhibits, and participation in the arts).
- Encouraging 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.
- Becoming involved and engaged in school programs, practices and activities.
- Communicating regularly with classroom teachers and other relevant school personnel.
- Participating in collaborative school and family efforts and functions.

### **Student Expectations (as developmentally appropriate)**

Students should engage in comprehensive efforts to learn about their own cultural history and an understanding of how culture affects learning. For example:

- Demonstrating respect and understanding of individuals' identities and diversity toward others.
- Contributing to a classroom environment that models respect, accountability and empowerment of perspectives.
- Becoming actively involved in school activities in addition to academic requirements.
- Developing positive and meaningful relationships with peers and school personnel.

## Resources

- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
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- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
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- Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. New York: Scholastic.
- Nieto, S. & Bode, P. (2018). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.