



# Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework



# For more than a century, education providers throughout the United States have strived and struggled to meet the diverse needs of American children and families. A complex system of biases and

structural inequities is at play, deeply rooted in our country's history, culture, and institutions. This system of inequity — which routinely confers advantage and disadvantage based on linguistic background, gender, skin color, and other characteristics — must be clearly understood, directly challenged, and fundamentally transformed. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has come to understand that the results we seek for all our children can never be fully achieved without incorporating an equity and inclusion lens in every facet of our work (see also New York State's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan). This understanding has created an urgency around promoting equitable opportunities that help all children thrive. New York State understands that the responsibility of education is not only to prevent the exclusion of historically silenced, erased, and disenfranchised groups, but also to assist in the promotion and perpetuation of cultures, languages and ways of knowing that have been devalued, suppressed, and imperiled by years of educational, social, political, economic neglect and other forms of oppression.

In January 2018, the New York State Board of Regents directed the Office of P-12 Education and Higher Education to convene a panel of experts, engage with stakeholders, and develop from the ground up a framework for culturally responsive-sustaining education. The New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, under the leadership of Dr. David Kirkland, drafted a robust guidance document that served as a springboard for this initiative. The New York State Education Department presented this guidance document to students, teachers, parents, school and district leaders, higher education faculty, community advocates, and policymakers. The guidelines in this document represent the collective insight of this work.

The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) framework is intended to help education stakeholders create student-centered learning environments that affirm cultural identities; foster positive academic outcomes; develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices;



empower students as agents of social change; and contribute to individual student engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking. The framework was designed to support education stakeholders in developing and implementing policies that educate all students effectively and equitably, as well as provide appropriate supports and services to promote positive student outcomes.

Historically, education debates have been polarized, with difference sometimes being viewed as an individual deficit. The CR-S Framework marks our journey forward and begins the evolution toward leveraging difference as an asset. The framework is grounded in four principles<sup>\*</sup>:

- **Welcoming and Affirming Environment**
- **High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction**
- **Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment**
- **Ongoing Professional Learning**

Each principle is illustrated by a set of features rooted in elements of quality education that illustrate how CR-S might look in practice across a range of domains, from the State Education Department to the classroom. The framework represents an opportunity for stakeholders to continue to work together and plan for the unique needs of their communities.

The New York State Education Department recognizes much of this work is already happening across the state and looks forward to an even deeper understanding of culturally responsive-sustaining education in New York State schools, districts, and communities. This framework reflects the State's commitment to improving learning results for all students by creating well-developed, culturally responsive-sustaining, equitable systems of support for achieving dramatic gains in student outcomes.

<sup>\*</sup> The 4 principles that organize State Education Department's CR-S Framework were inspired by the 4 high leverage strategies that emerged from Buffalo Public School's work on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education.



# The New York State guidelines for culturally responsive-sustaining education are grounded in a **VISION** of an education system that creates:

## I. Students who experience academic success



Students are prepared for rigor and independent learning. Students understand themselves as contributing members of an academically-rigorous, intellectually-challenging school and classroom community. Students demonstrate an ability to use critical reasoning, take academic risks, and leverage a growth mindset to learn from mistakes. Students are self-motivated, setting and revising academic personal goals to drive their own learning and growth.

## II. Students who are sociopolitically conscious and socioculturally responsive



Students acknowledge the limitations of their own perspectives. They have empathy for others while they appreciate and respect others' differences. They demonstrate cooperation and teamwork, using active listening and communication skills to resolve conflict. They use interpersonal skills to build and maintain strong relationships, including those along lines of difference, in their class and school communities.

All layers of the environment in which students learn (classroom, school, family, and community) affirm and value the various aspects of students' cultural identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, socioeconomic background). Role models in the classroom, school, family, and community recognize student strengths and offer opportunities for students to grow and learn.

## III. Students who have a critical lens through which they challenge inequitable systems of access, power, and privilege.



Students bring a critical lens to the world as they study historical and contemporary conditions of inequity and learn from historically marginalized voices. Students learn about power and privilege in the context of various communities and are empowered as agents of positive social change.



VISION

This vision is grounded in Gloria Ladson-Billings’ early work on culturally relevant teaching, specifically the three criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy she puts forth in Ladson-Billings (1995). The New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework includes guidelines for students, teachers, school leaders, district leaders, families and community members, higher education faculty, and Education Department policymakers. For

guidelines to be effective, all stakeholders must work together, prioritize and implement systems and structures that facilitate the scale of culturally responsive-sustaining practices, and hold each other accountable to short- and long-term goals.

When stakeholders work together to implement culturally responsive-sustaining practices, educators will grow in their ability to be:

SOCIOPOLITICALLY CONSCIOUS	SOCIOCULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
Demonstrate excellence by being inclusive-minded and asset-focused	Commit to understanding the role of culture in education as flexible, local, and global
Identify and critically examine both historical and contemporary power structures	Act as agents of social change to redress historical and contemporary oppression
Reflect, honor, value, and center various identity perspectives as assets in policies and practices (Sue, 2001)	Build alliances across difference to eradicate all forms of discrimination
Engage in critical conversations	Engage current and historical issues
Recognize that personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantage for others	Practice mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from one’s own



New York State Education Department Definition

Culturally responsive-sustaining (CR-S) education is grounded in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability) are recognized and regarded as assets for teaching and learning.

**CR-S education explores the relationship between historical and contemporary conditions of inequality and ideas that shape access, participation, and outcomes for learners.**

**The goal of the CR-S framework is to help educators design and implement a student-centered learning environment that:**

- **affirms racial and cultural identities and fosters positive academic outcomes**
- **develops students' abilities to connect across cultures**
- **empowers students as agents of social change**
- **contributes to an individual's**

**engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking.**

**To make this a reality, the Department, under the Board of Regents, has created a framework for CR-S practices. The framework is intended to be used by a variety of education stakeholders, including but not limited to students, teachers, school and district leaders, families and community members, higher education faculty and administrators, and Education Department policymakers.**

*This definition was created by the NYSED Expert Committee: Alfredo Artiles, Jeff Duncan-Andrade, David Kirkland, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Joyce Moy, Django Paris, Carla Shedd-Guild, Amy Stuart-Wells, Mariana Souto-Manning, Zoila Morrell.*

## What is culture?

The New York State Education Department understands culture as the multiple components of one's identity, including but not limited to: race, economic background, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability. Culture far transcends practices such as cuisines, art, music, and celebrations to also include ways of thinking, values, and forms of expression. These ways and forms are in constant flux, renegotiation, and evolution. Schools then become a meeting point for cultures, containing children and adults who bring with them multiple facets of their identity, along with unique experiences and perspectives.

From this perspective, learning is rooted in the lives and experiences of people and cultivated through activities that people find meaningful. When teaching is not rooted in students' lives, student learning suffers. Perhaps worst, biases take hold and deficit perspectives become normalized throughout our schools and classrooms, structuring entire systems that blame students for failure.

The school community is representative of many cultures, and therefore culture has consequences on how students experience schools. The framework is intentional about the relationship between culture and education, presenting a multi-tiered systems approach for cultural inclusion that broadens what ethnic groups, classes, sexualities, and abilities are privileged in the creation and maintenance of traditional education.

Research suggests that many students whose cultures are more closely aligned with the "cultural fabric" of schools experience praise and are viewed as more dedicated than those whose home cultures differ. Educators committed to understanding both the concept of culture and many different cultures can refocus their lens for viewing students' cultures not as "deficiencies to overcome" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87), but as assets who possess vibrant realities and rich reservoirs of knowledge. By making all cultures matter, our students' cultures can be positioned as strengths and as the foundation of empowering, rigorous, and innovative learning.

**The CR-S framework helps educators create student-centered learning environments that: affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning; develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change.**



### Welcoming and Affirming Environment

- Collective responsibility to learn about student cultures and communities.
- Close relationships with Students & Families.
- Social-Emotional Learning Programs.
- Materials that represent and affirm student identities.



### High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction

- Student-Led Civic Engagement.
- Critical Examination of Power Structures.
- Project-Based Learning on Social Justice Issues.
- Student Leadership Opportunities.



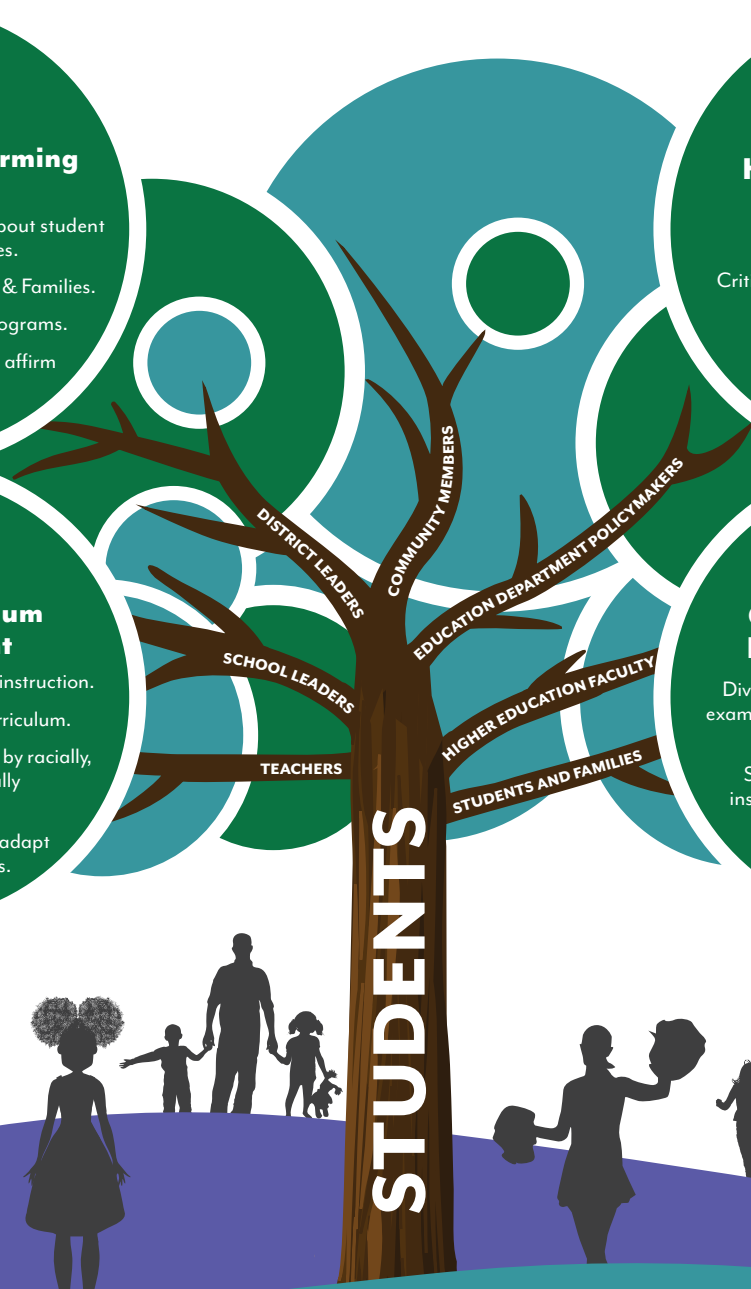
### Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment

- Current events incorporated into instruction.
- Students as co-designers of curriculum.
- Resources written and developed by racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives.
- Instructional strategies that adapt to diverse learning styles.

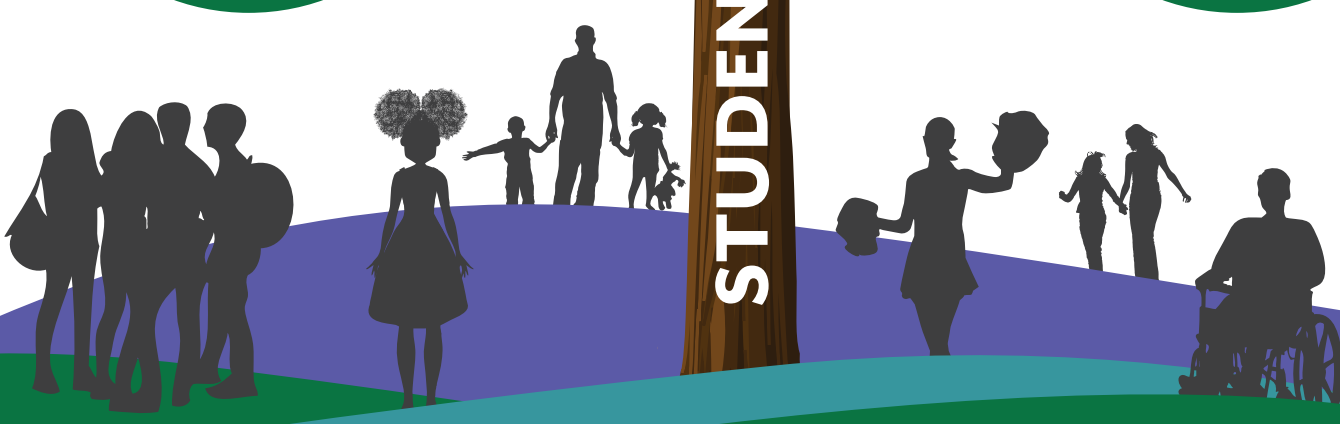


### Ongoing Professional Learning and Support

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training, examining implicit bias and interrogation of beliefs and assumptions.
- Support in aligning curriculum and instruction to the histories, languages, and experiences of traditionally marginalized voices.



STUDENTS



## What is Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education?

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education draws on decades of research in asset-based pedagogies that recognize that cultural difference (including racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, sexuality and ability) should be treated as assets for teaching and learning. This approach to education counters dominant narratives about difference as deficits or as characteristics of students and families that should be remediated or assimilated. Using this approach to education, all families are believed to have cultural capital, or knowledge, abilities, and networks, that can, and should, be leveraged in classrooms. While schooling has traditionally privileged the capital of families from dominant backgrounds, CR-S positions educators to acknowledge, value, and leverage the wealth of knowledge found in communities that have been marginalized.

Culturally responsive education is about teaching the students in front of you. To do this requires that one work to get to know their students and develop meaningful relationships with students while engaging in the students' communities. However, culturally responsive education must also be sustaining, that is it must work to encourage cultural pluralism and not cultural assimilation. Home and youth culture should be welcomed into the classroom as areas ripe for discussion. Differences should not just be seen as strengths, but they should also be maintained because they are what make students and families unique. How educators understand culture has real consequences for our children as a limited understanding of culture has the power to disadvantage some while privileging others (Kirkland, 2012).

## What is the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework?

The CR-S framework is an initiative by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) that establishes culturally responsive-sustaining guidelines for student, teachers, school and district leadership, families and community advocates, higher education, and the State Education Department. This initiative is both urgent and timely, as it responds to many of the public forum comments about Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), one of which is the necessity of including culturally responsive-sustaining education into all aspects of public education. The State Education Department worked closely with various academic experts, renowned in their respective fields, to draft a NYSED definition of culturally responsive-sustaining education. New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (Metro Center) used these conversations to draft a robust guidance document from which this framework was created. The framework was then built from the ground up, drawing on feedback from stakeholders across the state who generously gave of their time and insight. After three rounds of feedback, this framework incorporates the collective insight of these stakeholders.

This document is intended for use across stakeholder groups. A guiding principle of asset-based pedagogies is that a culturally responsive-sustaining approach to teaching and learning benefits a broad range of stakeholders. In the design of this framework, we thought about those who work in urban, suburban and rural communities. We considered the unique needs of each of these environments and encourage educators to take up this framework,

recognizing the unique needs of their teaching contexts and the plethora of diversity that exists in all educational environments.

NYSED recognizes that for culturally responsive-sustaining education to thrive, the impetus cannot be placed solely on student, teachers, and school leaders; all stakeholders must work together to create the conditions under which this vision of education can flourish. NYSED believes that we must incorporate an equity and inclusion lens in every facet of the state's work to achieve student success outcomes for all students. Thus, the framework aligns closely with other NYSED policies, including The New York State Board of Regents and the NYSED Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA plan), specifically:

- **Recognize the effect of school environment on student academic performance and support efforts to improve the climate of all schools.**
- **Promote a relationship of trust and respect between schools and families, recognizing that student achievement and school improvement are shared responsibilities.**
- **Provide educators with opportunities for continual professional learning in the areas of equity, anti-bias, multicultural, and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogies.**
- **Support districts and their communities in engaging in critical conversations about culturally responsive-sustaining educational systems.**



# The 4 Principles of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education

The 4 principles that organize the New York State Education Department's CR-S Framework are inspired by the 4 high leverage strategies that emerged from Buffalo Public School's work on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education.



**Welcoming and affirming environment**



**High expectations and rigorous instruction**



**Inclusive curriculum and assessment**



**Ongoing professional learning**

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## Welcoming and affirming environment

**SYMBOL**



**DESCRIPTION**

**A welcoming and affirming environment** feels safe. It is a space where people can find themselves represented and reflected, and where they understand that all people are treated with respect and dignity. The environment ensures all cultural identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, religion, socioeconomic background) are affirmed, valued, and used as vehicles for teaching and learning.

**RESOURCES**

- School Climate and Culture Index
- Mental Health Education Literacy Schools: Linking to a Continuum of Well-Being
- English Language Learner/Multilingual Learner Parent Resources
- Social Emotional Learning: Essential for Learning, Essential for Life
- Guidelines and Resources for Social and Emotional Development and Learning (SEDL) in New York State
- NYSED Information and Resources Regarding Restorative Justice and Trauma Sensitivity Training
- The New York State Dignity for All Students Act (DASA)

## High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction

### SYMBOL



### DESCRIPTION

**High expectations and rigorous instruction** prepare the community for rigor and independent learning. The environment is academically rigorous and intellectually challenging, while also considering the different ways students learn. Instruction includes opportunities to use critical reasoning, take academic risks, and leverage a growth mindset to learn from mistakes. Messages encourage positive self-image and empower others to succeed.

### RESOURCES

New York State Board of Regents Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA Plan)

New York State Next Generation English Language Arts and Mathematics Learning Standards

New York State My Brother's Keeper (Initiative)

New York State Early Learning Standards

Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities

State Systemic Improvement Plan Multi-tiered Systems of Support Model

Blueprint for English Language Learner/Multilingual Learner Success

Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks

## Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment

### SYMBOL



### DESCRIPTION

**Inclusive curriculum and assessment** elevate historically marginalized voices. It includes opportunities to learn about power and privilege in the context of various communities and empowers learners to be agents of positive social change. It provides the opportunity to learn about perspectives beyond one's own scope. It works toward dismantling systems of biases and inequities, and decentering dominant ideologies in education.

### RESOURCES

Teacher Test Development and Participation Opportunities

Civic Readiness Initiative

The New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework and Toolkits

## Ongoing Professional Learning

### SYMBOL



### DESCRIPTION

**Ongoing professional learning** is rooted in the idea that teaching and learning is an adaptive process needing constant reexamination (Moll, et al., 1992; Gay, 2010). It allows learners to develop and sharpen a critically conscious lens toward instruction, curriculum, assessment, history, culture, and institutions. Learners must be self-directed and take on opportunities that directly impact learning outcomes.

### RESOURCES

Diverse and Learner-Ready Teachers Initiative

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs)

New York State Teaching Standards

NYU Metro TAC-D 2018-2019 Regional Workshops

# Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Mindsets

All stakeholders (students, teachers, school leaders, district leaders, families and community members, higher education faculty and administrators, and Education Department Policymakers) can adopt these culturally responsive-sustaining aligned mindsets as a lens through which to implement the CR-S guidelines outlined in this framework.

New York State **EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS** can contribute to a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education for students by:

**Believing that culture is not an addition but is a critical component of education.**

**Believing that students and their families are individuals with their own assets, knowledge, and abilities who should be valued and consulted.**

- Student and community assets should be sustained and leveraged for academic achievement.
- Consider students as co-designers of curriculum and drivers of instruction (Jenkins & Healey, 2009)
- Embed community input into curriculum to reflect diversity of the local and global community.

**Believing that critical and continuous self-reflection is required to dismantle systems of biases and inequities rooted in our country's history, culture, and institutions.**

- Employ a critical pedagogy that empowers students to see themselves as agents of social change and architects of their own destinies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).
- Employ a critical lens (racial, gender, sexual identity, linguistic, religious, ability, socioeconomic, or other salient cultural identities) when developing resources and intervention frameworks to de-center dominant ideologies and pedagogies that ignore or marginalize diverse students.
- Identify and one's own implicit biases, reflecting on how they may shape one's feelings, actions, academic expectations, or behavioral expectations of students based on particular aspects of their identities (race, gender, social class, nationality, language, sexual orientation, ability, etc.)
- Assess and reflect on one's racial literacy skills, "the ability to read, discuss, and write about situations that involve race or racism" (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013), and seek opportunities to practice and develop racial literacy with peers and students.

# New York State **TEACHERS** can cultivate a Culturally Responsive- Sustaining education for students by:



**Creating a  
welcoming  
and affirming  
environment**



**Fostering high  
expectations  
and rigorous  
instruction**



**Identifying  
inclusive  
curriculum and  
assessment**



**Engaging  
in ongoing  
professional  
learning and  
support**



## Creating a welcoming and affirming environment

- Assess the physical environment of the classroom and school to determine whether a variety of diverse cultures, languages, orientations, and identities are reflected, represented and valued. Promote a variety of perspectives that represent the diversity of the state of New York beyond designated icons, historical figures, months and holidays.
- Build rapport and develop positive relationships with students, and their families, by learning about their interests and inviting them to share their opinions and concerns. Find opportunities to address and incorporate their opinions and concerns.
- Provide multiple opportunities for parents to communicate in their language and method of preference, such as digital and in-person formats, class visits, phone conversations, text message, email, collaborative projects, and impromptu conferences.
- Work with families early and often to gather insight into students' cultures, goals, and learning preferences.
- Enact classroom management strategies that avoid assigning blame or guilt to students based on perceptions about their cultures, differences, or home lives.
- Work toward creating an environment that establishes mutually agreed-upon norms and encourages students to act out of a sense of personal responsibility to follow those norms, not from a fear of punishment or desire for a reward.
- Meet with families to understand and align the recognition, reward, and incentive practices used in the classroom to the values and cultural norms of families.
- Create opportunities to allow different groups and ideas to become part of the fabric of the school community by organizing proactive community-building circles and activities that promote positive relationships among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Include students, teachers, school staff, leaders, families, and community members in these opportunities.
- Use restorative justice circles and structures to welcome students back into learning when harm has occurred.
- Participate in the review of school and district policies (codes of conduct, curriculum reviews, community engagement, etc.).
- Attend or volunteer at community events, when possible, to develop relationships with families and the community outside of the classroom setting.
- Respond to instances of disrespectful speech about student identities by intervening if hurtful speech or slurs are used, addressing the impact of said language, and discussing appropriate and inappropriate responses when instances of bias occur. Use these moments as opportunities to build classroom environments of acceptance.
- Identify and address implicit bias in the school and community environment.
- Encourage students to take academic risks in order to create an environment that capitalizes on student mistakes as learning opportunities that help students grow academically and emotionally.



## Fostering high expectations and rigorous instruction

- Have high expectations and deliver rigorous instruction for all students regardless of identity markers, including race, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and economic background.
- Reflect on your own implicit bias, how that bias might impact your expectations for student achievement or the decisions you make in the classroom, and the steps you can take to address your biases and their impact on students.
- Strive to be culturally sustaining by centering the identities of all students in classroom instruction, encouraging cultural pluralism rather than asking students to minimize their identities in order to be successful.
- Provide parents with information about what their child is expected to learn, know, and do at his/her grade level and ways to reinforce concepts at home (e.g., using the home language; reading with, or monitoring, independent reading).
- Promote alternative achievement metrics that also support academics (e.g., demonstrating growth, leadership, character development, Social Emotional Learning competencies, or school values).
- Invite families and community members to speak or read in the classroom as a means to teach about topics that are culturally specific and aligned to the classroom curriculum and/or content area.
- Provide opportunities for students to critically examine topics of power and privilege. These can be planned project-based learning initiatives, instructional activities embedded into the curriculum, or discussion protocols used in response to inequity that occurs in the school and/or classroom.
- Incorporate current events, even if they are controversial, into instruction. Utilize tools (prompting discussion questions, Socratic seminar, conversation protocols) that encourage students to engage with difficult topics (power, privilege, access, inequity) constructively.
- Be responsive to students' experiences by providing them with a space to process current events.

**Have high expectations and deliver rigorous instruction for all students regardless of identity markers, including race, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and economic background.**

- Help students identify their different learning styles in both classwork and homework and incorporate instructional strategies and assignments that are responsive to those learning styles.
- Provide students with opportunities to present to their peers through project-based or stations-based learning to leverage student experience and expertise.
- Co-create explicit classroom expectations that meet the needs of all students.



## Identifying inclusive curriculum and assessment

- Feature and highlight resources written and developed by traditionally marginalized voices that offer diverse perspectives on race, culture, language, gender, sexual identity, ability, religion, nationality, migrant/refugee status, socioeconomic status, housing status, and other identities traditionally silenced or omitted from curriculum.
- Play a role in helping schools to understand and align curriculum to the variety of histories, languages and experiences that reflect the diversity of the State population.
- Pair traditional curricular content with digital and other media platforms that provide current and relevant context from youth culture.
- Provide homework, projects, and other classroom materials in multiple languages.
- Provide regular opportunities for social emotional learning strategies within lessons and as discrete learning activities.
- Utilize student data points and assessment measures that reflect learning spaces, modalities, and demonstration of proficiency that go beyond metrics traditionally associated with standardized testing.
- Engage students in youth participatory action research that empowers youth to be agents of positive change in their community.
- Connect instructional content with the daily lives of students by using culturally-specific examples (e.g., music, movies, text) that tap into their existing interests, knowledge, and youth culture.
- Take field trips to community-learning sites, such as museums, parks, cultural centers, neighborhood recreational centers, and community centers, to foster students' cultural understanding and connection to the surrounding community.
- Incorporate cooperative learning activities to encourage understanding of diverse perspectives; support students in working cooperatively toward goals; and highlight students' unique strengths in the group (e.g., public speaking, note-taking, writing, drawing, etc.).
- Support students in creating and running student-led initiatives.

**Encourage students to take academic risks in order to create an environment that capitalizes on student mistakes as learning opportunities that help students grow academically and emotionally.**



## Engaging in ongoing professional learning and support

- Continuously learn about implicit bias, with attention to identifying and challenging your own biases, and identifying and addressing implicit bias in the school community.
- Use professional learning activities as opportunities to better acquaint oneself with the diverse communities in which their students live.
- Set professional goals related to CR-S practices.
- Engage in inquiry groups and professional learning communities with peers and mentors.
- Analyze discipline data to determine any trends across sub-groups or bias toward students.

