



FINDING: STUDENT LEARNING IS IMPACTED BY A SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT THAT OFTEN LACKS DIVERSITY, ENGAGING AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULA, AND POSITIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS TO SUPPORT LEARNING.

DESCRIPTION

Many YPE teams have explored the relationship between school climate and student learning. Through studies on advanced courses, student engagement, and student-teacher relationships, a common conclusion is for schools to celebrate the diversity present in their school. Students want all classrooms to be welcoming spaces that honor their identity, and for the curricula to reflect their story or connect to their life. Many students believe increasing the number of teachers of color - and supporting white teachers who are teaching students of color - will improve student learning.



Relationships play a critical role in student learning. Students want opportunities to take ownership over their education, but this is highly dependent on the nature of their relationships with teachers.

Classroom Diversity

Many high school YPE teams have taken on projects focusing on the experience of students of color, and more specifically, their sense of belonging in advanced classes. Washburn's team collected input from ninth and tenth grade students on posters and found that while 87% of white students planned to take more advanced courses at Washburn, just 50% of Black students did ([Washburn 2019](#)). They also asked students if the makeup of advanced classes impacts their likelihood of taking them; 39% of white students said no, compared to 28% of students who identify as more than one race, 11% of Black students, and none (0%) of Asian or Latinx students surveyed.

Southwest's team wanted to know why students were in the hallways during class time. One student from Southwest commented on why they skip class/stay in the hallways, "I don't like class, it makes me feel uncomfortable. I didn't go to this class because I'm the only Black kid." Another Southwest student stated, "I don't like white people, they don't like me, white people don't believe in us, they always think we're skipping, I can't do my work quietly without people thinking I'm doing something bad. White people can work quietly without interruptions, black kids can't have fun, white kids can, they can be loud in the halls, we can't" ([Southwest 2019](#)).

"I don't like class, it makes me feel uncomfortable. I didn't go to this class because I'm the only Black kid." Southwest 2019

Engaging and Culturally Relevant Curricula

Marcy Open's YPE team investigated whether students feel their school provides enough opportunities for them to learn about other cultures. Their research found that students want to learn more about other cultures but feel they do not have the opportunity to do so, which negatively impacts their school experience. Their survey asked students if they know about their classmates' cultures, and ways they would like to learn more about one another. Fifty six percent of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed to the statement "I want to know more about my classmates' cultures ([Marcy 2019](#))."
Less than 40 percent responded agree or strongly agree to the statement "I have opportunities to learn

about my classmates' cultures when I am at school ([Marcy 2019](#))."

Positive Student-Teacher Relationships

Analysis from Field's YPE team concluded: **"If you have a positive relationship, then difficult discussions about race may be more comfortable."**

Field's YPE team explored how the lack of teacher diversity impacts student learning and classroom discussions. For example, of students surveyed at Field, 44% said they do not feel like teachers teach enough lessons (or have enough curriculum) on race. One Field student stated, "I feel like teachers of different backgrounds can help us understand different perspectives" ([Field 2019](#)). And another student wrote, "I think it impacts me because having teachers of different backgrounds helps me learn more things. If we have teachers of different backgrounds we have teachers who know different things to teach us" ([Field 2019](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by their research, YPE teams have provided the following recommendations to enhance student learning in MPS:

1. Involve students in school decisions related to curriculum and school celebrations to better represent student priorities and cultures.
2. Hire more staff of color, and encourage and prepare all staff to talk about race and culture in their classrooms.
3. Provide all teachers with professional development on engaging teaching strategies and approaches that work for different student populations.
4. Ensure that school counselors are encouraging students of color to register for advanced classes and teachers are prepared to ensure all students feel welcomed and supported in the class.