



**Success Indicator CC01:** All personnel (including front office staff, bus drivers, custodians, learning/behavioral support classroom aides, and cafeteria workers) participate in training to reflect upon their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds and to support their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. (5860)

**Overview:** School staff other than teachers can help create a school climate that supports students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. By applying the major themes of culturally responsive teaching to schoolwide practices, staff can contribute to the increased academic achievement that comes in environments of respect and care. Staff can be supported in this role by reflecting on their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a professional development setting.

**Questions:** How can schools support students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds? How can schools develop climates that value diversity? How can staff be prepared to support students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, even if they have non-teaching roles?

### **How can schools support students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds?**

While research is still emerging in this area, there is evidence that whole school approaches to valuing students' backgrounds and experiences can contribute positively to school climate.

When students report positively about their school's climate, such as feeling safe and engaged, there are fewer discipline referrals and better achievement. (Biag, 2016; Gage, et al. 2016; Gase, et al. 2017). Efforts to create such climates can take inspiration from research on culturally responsive teaching, which has shown that students succeed academically when their cultural and linguistic background is supported (Bishop, Ladwig, & Berryman 2014; Cabrera, et al. 2014; Dee and Penner, 2017; López 2016). All school staff can use the major themes of culturally responsive teaching to create a whole-school climate that values and respects students' experiences. Culturally responsive teaching draws on a wide range of scholarship on language, culture, and learning. The major themes of this approach include the following:

- **All people have a cultural and linguistic background based in our homes, communities, and experiences in youth.** This background informs how students use language and literacy to understand the world (Banks & Banks 2016; Hornberger, 1989; Nieto, 1992; Rymes, 2014).
- **All people can learn beyond their background throughout their life, in schooling, their career, and other new experiences.** A student's cultural and linguistic background shapes how they learn something new or unfamiliar (Heath, 1983; Janks, 2000; Martin, 2009).
- **Differences and similarities between the backgrounds of school staff and students should be openly discussed.** These discussions can value student experiences and help avoid misunderstandings and marginalization (Gee, 2012; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).



- **The cultural and linguistic practices students are familiar with may come with less power than dominant cultural and linguistic practices.** Special effort to ensure mutual understanding may be needed when students and school staff have different backgrounds (Delpit 1988; Hornberger, 1989; Janks, 2000).

These beliefs that motivate culturally responsive pedagogy can inform the work of other school staff if they are given a chance to reflect on their own cultural and linguistic background as well as those of students.

#### **How can schools develop climates that value diversity?**

Successful efforts to create welcoming schools involve all staff whether or not they are teachers. For example, in the schoolwide “firewalk” ritual described by Curry (2016), all adults at the school were involved as authentically caring community members to whom students were accountable. This program promoted “students’ healthy identity development, collective social conscience, reflexivity, and agency” (Curry, 2016, p. 884). Rutledge, et al. (2015) compared urban high schools and found that higher performing schools worked to support students’ social emotional learning in addition to academic goals. These schools included a shared commitment among all staff to value students’ communities and strive for their success. Theoharis (2010) describes the reform practices of principals who targeted policies to address problems in their schools, including low student achievement and “a school climate that needed to be more welcoming to marginalized families and disrupt the disconnect between the school and the community, low-income families, and families of color” (p. 340). Successful efforts noted by Theoharis (2010) and related to this indicator were:

- Directing all staff who have contact with families (such as during intake and dismissal) to greet families more warmly and to know more about them.
- Prioritizing professional development that targeted competencies specifically related to the needs of their students.
- Giving all staff a role in a program that recognized individual students for academic achievements or positive behavior.

#### **How can staff be prepared to support students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds?**

School staff must have structured opportunities to reflect on their own cultural and linguistic background to effectively participate in whole school approaches to support students. Several existing programs or workshop models can be adapted to provide personnel with a safe and non-judgmental space for critical reflection and professional development

##### ***Critical multilingual awareness***

García (2015) recommends Critical Multilingual Awareness (CMLA) programs, which train personnel in three areas: (a) knowing about the speakers of the languages present in the school, (b) considering translanguaging, the fluid language practice of bilinguals, as an integral part of the school linguistic culture, and (c) the convergence of historical discrimination and contemporary issues of language and power in linguistically diverse settings.

##### ***Peace Corps “Culture Matters” curriculum***

The U.S. government administrated programs to train US citizens to assist communities around the world while fostering cultural dialogues. Volunteer training includes an extensive curriculum about cultural and linguistic background called Culture Matters, which is freely available for anyone to use: [http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/library/T0087\\_culturematters.pdf](http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/library/T0087_culturematters.pdf).

Individual lessons adapted from this curriculum are also available, and some objectives applicable to school staff include:

- Examining features of culture to determine which are visible and which are invisible <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/culture-iceberg/>
- Distinguishing culture and personal individuality <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/everyone-has-culture-everyone-different/>
- Considering what it means to be “American” in the eyes of people from other cultures <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/americans/>
- Experiencing what it is like to confront and deal with a culture highly different from their own. <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/brief-encounters/>



- Listing features of their own culture and evaluating how those features have influenced their lives. <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/features-culture/>

### **EdChange workshop materials**

EdChange seeks to “cultivate equity and inspire literacy toward positive change in schools and beyond.” They provide support to teachers and schools toward that goal, including resources for workshops on diversity, social justice, and multicultural education: <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activityarch.html>.

Some of the activities that serve as opportunities for school staff to reflect on their cultural and linguistic background include:

- An introductory activity about the many ways that people can show respect. <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/activity1.html>
- Activities about how to reflect on how their own experiences as students made them feel included or excluded. <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/inclusion.html>
- Activities about how to reflect on what it means for a student population to be multicultural. <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/multicultural.html>

### **Teaching Tolerance workshop materials**

Teacher Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center “dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations, and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation’s children.” They publish materials to aid teachers and school staff to reflect on their work and the mission of schools: <http://www.tolerance.org/professional-development>

In addition, they write sample lessons for teachers about social justice themes. Some of the activities that serve as opportunities for school staff to reflect on their cultural and linguistic background include:

- Reflecting on the meaning of diversity <http://www.tolerance.org/module/social-justice-standards-unpacking-diversity>

- Exploring diversity’s impact on school systems: <http://www.tolerance.org/module/fulfilling-american-promise-education-system-outside-and-wit>
- Reflecting on bias incidents at school and how to speak up: <http://www.tolerance.org/implement-speak-up>

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