

Cultural Responsiveness

Dear Parents & Guardians:

In the United States, we are blessed with abundant cultural diversity. Culture plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals.

Research tells us that culture, teaching, and learning are interconnected and that there is a direct link between student achievement and the extent to which teaching acknowledges the student's cultural diversity.

Students from homes in which the language and culture do not closely correspond to that of the school may be at a disadvantage in the learning process. These children often become alienated and feel disengaged from learning. As educators and parents, we must do all we can to make sure that all students have the same advantages.

Because parents are our children's most important teachers, I wanted to provide you with some suggestions about how to support your child's education.

- **A parent is usually a child's first teacher. It is therefore important for you as a parent to offer positive lessons to your children.**
- **Get involved in your child's education from the beginning – this is especially important for fathers.**
- **Be sure to ask questions of teachers and counselors about your child's progress.**
- **Encourage your children with their schoolwork.**
- **Be proud of your native language and culture – let your children know it is an important quality and truly American to have a rich heritage from another country.**

Education is a partnership and your help is essential in the success of your child in the classroom and beyond. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any comments or questions.

Sincerely,

Leonor Sebastia
Regional Vice President
Mountain Region



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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

The Importance of Culturally Responsive Instruction

Our public schools serve millions of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Cultural diversity is an important force in the lives of teachers, administrators, and students that impacts how we think, learn, speak, and perceive our world.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Defined

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education is defined as “adjusting how we teach to the needs and experiences of students by using their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them.” The purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to maximize learning for all students, including those historically failed by the system.

African American, Native American, Hispanic and other non-mainstream students often bring to the school setting a distinctive set of cultural values, beliefs, and norms that are incongruent with the middle class cultural norms and behaviors of schools. The result is a lack of cultural synchronization between the student and school.

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education validates and affirms the home language and culture of students through the use of responsive instructional strategies, which act as bridges or enablers to acceptance, achievement, and empowerment in academic settings and mainstream culture at large.*

*Los Angeles Unified School District, 2006

Researchers Irvine & Armento (2001) affirm that cultural variables are powerful, yet often overlooked, factors that explain school failure in diverse students and suggest that conventional approaches to improving the academic achievement of students of color have not been successful in large part because they are grounded in deficit orientations that focus on what students don't have or can't do.

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Students with disabilities also suffer from similar consequences resulting from perceptions that the student doesn't fit within the school's culture. When there is a cultural mismatch, the research suggests that the school setting becomes hostile, and miscommunication, confrontations between the student, the teacher, and the home, alienation, diminished self-esteem, and eventual school failure frequently occur.



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TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Basic Beliefs of a Culturally Responsive Educator

SOURCE: IRVINE & ARMENTO (2001)

- Hold high academic and personal expectation for each child
- Provide for each child equitable access to the necessary learning resources and sufficient opportunities to learn
- Ensure that learning outcomes are meaningful, relevant, useful, and important to each child
- Nurture learning-support communities for each child (families, peers, homework hotlines, community centers)
- Facilitate the maximum growth of each learner by making informed academic adaptations that match and build upon the learner's prior knowledge, experiences, skills, and beliefs
- Build positive and supportive school and classroom learning environments that are grounded in mutual and genuine respect for cultural diversity
- Promote classroom climates built on social justice, democracy, and equity
- Promote individual empowerment, self-efficacy, positive self-regard, and a belief in societal reform
- Value diversity as well as human commonalities
- Believe that it is their role and responsibility to provide effective and empowering instruction for children

Additionally, Dr. Sharroky Hollie, assistant professor in teacher education at California State University, Dominguez Hills, Executive Director of the Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning and Pearson author, offers these tips to becoming culturally and linguistically responsive:

- Recognize your student population in terms of who is being underserved, who is not being responded to culturally and/or linguistically
- Assess if these students' underachievement is related to their language proficiency and/or lack of responsiveness on the part of the instruction in relation to engagement, motivation, and/or skills development.
- Using the instructional strands as an umbrella, identify key strategies labeled in this text as CRI (with a special icon) that would be culturally and linguistically responsive and act as bridges to achievement
- Infuse the identified strategies into your daily teaching, creating consistent moments for students to connect to what is being taught in the classroom culturally and linguistically



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IN THE NEWS

Independent Research Finds English Learners Significantly Improve Reading and Language Skills with Pearson's 'Reading Street' Curriculum

Standardized Test Scores Skyrocket; Students Exemplify Proficiency, Exit ELL Program

GLENVIEW, IL / MARCH 17, 2009

Today, there are five million students enrolled in U.S. classrooms across the nation as English language learners, with a significant percentage of them struggling to keep up academically with their English-speaking peers. English learners continue to drop out of schools at an unprecedented rate, but independent research now indicates that an innovative curriculum for elementary students significantly improves students' reading ability while also enhancing their English language skills – a finding that could potentially reverse the disturbing drop-out trend.

http://www.pearsoned.com/pr_2009/031709a.htm

California Association for Bilingual Education and Pearson Announce "Bill of Rights" for California's English Language Learners

Call to Action for Meeting Needs of State's Most Vulnerable Students

LONG BEACH, CA / FEBRUARY 25, 2008

At today's opening of The California Association for Bilingual Education's (CABE) Annual Conference, the education company Pearson and CABE announced an "English Learners' Bill of Rights" to focus public attention on the increasing needs of the booming California student population whose first language is not English. Today, 25 percent or 1.6 million California students are English learners and that number is growing every day. Unfortunately, the number of English learners dropping out of school is growing every day too.

http://www.pearsoned.com/pr_2009/022509.htm





Push is on for a 'common' education standard for US schoolchildren

The state-by-state system leaves many students 'inadequately prepared,' Education Secretary Arne Duncan said Wednesday at a Monitor breakfast.

BY DAVE COOK / CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR / JUNE 10, 2009

Education Secretary Arne Duncan threw his weight Wednesday behind a "common" education standard for all of America's schoolchildren, saying the current state-by-state system has produced uneven results in which some students "are totally, inadequately prepared to go into a competitive university, let alone graduate."

<http://features.csmonitor.com/politics/2009/06/10/push-is-on-for-a-common-education-standard-for-us-schoolchildren/>

Meaningful reform begins with lowering dropout rates

BY WILLARD SAKIESTEWA GILBERT / ARIZONA REPUBLIC / MAY 16, 2009

While the nearly \$1 billion Arizona received under the first round of federal stimulus funding for education has immediate benefits in terms of job retention, the depth of its impact should be measured by student outcomes. As decisions are made about how these funds are spent, there can be no argument about the urgent need to fund programs that support those students most likely to drop out of high school - students of color and Native American students.

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2009/05/16/20090516gilbert16.html>

Dropout numbers troubling

New figures show other racial groups recovering from a school dropout spike better than African Americans

BY DENNIS MYERS / RENO NEWS & REVIEW / MAY 16, 2009

An era of hope for African-Americans as a result of the Obama election still does not solve entrenched racial problems in schools and in the economy, some scholars say.

<http://www.newsreview.com/reno/content?oid=1010427>

A Few Words for Obama on Closing the Achievement Gap

BY GREG TOPPO / USA TODAY / JANUARY 15, 2009

As a candidate, President-elect Barack Obama promised to reduce the "pervasive achievement gap" that for decades has separated many white, middle-class students from their poor, often minority, peers. As president, he'll have an opportunity to keep his promise. But what should he do first? Four big education thinkers offer their advice.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2009-01-14-obama-achievement_N.htm

School Matters

Pre-school Helps Close the Learning Gap

BY VIVIAN PO / NEW AMERICA MEDIA, NEWS REPORT / JUNE 03, 2009

Providing high-quality pre-school education to more Latino and African-American children is key in closing the achievement gaps in California's K-12 public education system, according to a recent study.

http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=bb0cf77a2fa9c75ed7c4805032805101

Young boost diversity as population ages

BY TYCHE HENDRICKS / SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE / MAY 14, 2009

The population of the United States – and of California – is becoming older on average and also more racially and ethnically diverse. But the folks who are aging are not the same as the ones who are increasing the nation's diversity, according to 2008 population estimates released today by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The problem, said Hayes-Bautista, is that the state's Latinos have lower rates of high school graduation and college attendance than average, in part because their parents had less schooling.

"The biggest area of concern for me is the performance of the educational system," he said. "That's what's going to make or break the U.S. economy for the 21st century."

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/14/MNCT17K1F4.DTL>

The power of diversity in a changing world

BY NAOMI LEDE / HUNTSVILLE ITEM / JUNE 1, 2009

During the past two decades, there has evolved an increasing interest in diversity and multicultural education at all educational levels.

http://www.itemonline.com/opinion/local_story_152020149.html

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education, to put it more simply, validates and affirms the home language and culture of students through the use of responsive instructional strategies, which act as bridges or enablers to acceptance, achievement, and empowerment in academic settings and mainstream culture at large.



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