

## Teacher Quality Standard II

**Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.**

*The most important action an effective teacher takes at the beginning of the year is creating a climate for learning.*

*—Mary Beth Blegan, former U.S. Department of Education teacher-in-residence*

A positive classroom environment enhances the academic achievement of all students, promotes appropriate classroom behavior, and is welcoming to families and adults. A respect for diversity and the uniqueness of each individual is valued. A sense of community is created in which members encourage and promote the learning of each other through collaboration, communication, and mutual respect as they work to achieve individual and common goals.

### Element A

**Teachers foster a predictable learning environment in the classroom in which each student has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults and peers.**

*Respect is your most powerful management tool for instilling good classroom discipline. But if the teacher does not have respect then it will not happen.*

*—Changing Minds.org*

Professional practices referenced under each element of the Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Teachers are cumulative. Therefore, for teachers to be proficient in fostering a positive learning environment, they must model respect and empathy for all students. They must also create an environment in which the diverse pers

#### PROFICIENT RATING LEVEL

##### PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: THE TEACHER:

- *Creates a classroom environment which values diverse perspectives.*

In order to create an environment that values diverse perspectives, the teacher must be knowledgeable of the experiences that lead to students' perspectives and how these impact student thinking and learning. Once the teacher displays value for each student's perspectives, she can foster an environment that allows students to feel safe sharing their beliefs and opinions. This is the foundation for creating a positive learning environment which allows students to be receptive to the diverse perspectives of others.

Colorado classrooms are composed of students from many different cultures, languages, races, and backgrounds. This type of variety can enrich the lives of students. When teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in discussions with their peers and participate in collaborative learning activities, they support a learning environment that values individuals' perspectives.

*See also Standard II, Element B and Standard III, Element F.*

Benefits of these learning experiences are:

- Students learn to work with different types of individuals.
- Students learn to respect and value peers' individual differences.
- Students interact more freely with their peers because they feel safe from ridicule, put-downs, and bullying.
- The class develops a sense of community and trust in which all students feel valued and respected.

*Refer to this external resource for additional information:*

[Click here to go back to the table of contents and view the resource guide in its entirety.](#)



- Article: “Appreciating and Valuing Diversity” site sponsored by North Central Collaboration for Education in Nondestructive Testing  
<http://www.ndt-ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/Diversity.htm>  
Article provides ideas for how to teach students a respect for diversity.

*Refer to this internal resource for additional information:*

- Sentence Starters for Teaching Students Accountable Talk  
Document provides examples of sentence starters that can be used for respectful dialogue.
- *Establishes a nurturing and caring relationship with each student.*

Building relations with students implies agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the child brings to the class (from home, culture, peers), and allowing the experiences of the child to be recognized in the classroom. Further, developing relationships requires skill by the teacher — such as the skills of listening, empathy, caring and having positive regard for others. (Hattie, 2009, p. 118)

In classes with person-centered teachers, there is more engagement, more respect of self and others, there are fewer resistant behaviors, there is greater non-directivity (student-initiated and student-regulated activities), and there are higher achievement outcomes. (Hattie, 2009, p 119)

Positive teacher-student relationships — evidenced by teachers' reports of low conflict, a high degree of closeness and support, and little dependency — have been shown to support students' adjustment to school, contribute to their social skills, promote academic performance, and foster students' resiliency in academic performance (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Teachers who experience close relationships with students reported that their students were less likely to avoid school, appeared more self-directed, more cooperative, and more engaged in learning (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004). Students reported liking school more and experiencing less loneliness if they had a close relationship with their teachers. Students with better teacher-student relationships also showed better performance on measures of academic performance and school readiness. (Birch & Ladd, 1997, Rimm-Kaufman, n.d., para. 6)

This professional practice represents the impact of implementing the practices described under Partially Proficient and Proficient. For teachers to establish a nurturing and caring relationship with each student, they must first demonstrate respect and empathy for students. When students trust that their perspectives are valued by the teacher, they are more willing to have a relationship with a teacher that promotes learning and social development.

Common Challenges to Teaching Social Skills Referenced in Element A	
Challenges	Response
My job is to teach. I have enough to cover without teaching social skills, too. Social skills are the responsibility of the parents or caregivers.	Given the accountability and demands on teachers' time, it can appear overwhelming to add social skills instruction. However, a teacher's job is to develop the whole child and ensure students are equipped with the skills necessary for success beyond the classroom. Students who feel disrespected by their peers or unwelcomed in the classroom are more likely to disengage from the learning process. Not only do they miss out on development of important life skills, but they also miss out on learning critical content.
I can't control how students treat each other.	Teachers can improve student relationships by modeling respect and empathy for each student. Teachers must communicate clear expectations for how students are to collaborate and communicate with one another. Students can help develop group norms and take responsibility for holding their peers accountable to abide by these norms.

[Click here to go back to the table of contents and view the resource guide in its entirety.](#)

