

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 B

Teachers demonstrate a commitment to and respect for diversity, while working toward common goals as a community and as a country.

To be effective, teachers must treat the culture, heritage, and language of all their students con respeto.

—Eva Midobuche

Professional practices referenced under each element of the Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Teachers are cumulative. Therefore, for teachers to be proficient in demonstrating a commitment to and respect for diversity, an environment in which diversity is respected and used to further student learning must be created. By using instructional strategies, activities, and materials that reflect students' backgrounds and value their individual contributions, teachers establish a sense of community in which student interactions are positive and common goals can be established.

BASIC RATING LEVEL

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: THE TEACHER:

- ***Creates a classroom environment in which diversity is used to further student learning.***

Students should be recognized and respected for who they are individually, who they are as defined by the characteristics they possess, and who they are as part of the groups to which they belong. At a minimum, when we think about diversity, we need to consider not only race but gender, religion, physical challenges, economic status, age, disability, sexual orientation, and learning differences.

Respect for **diversity** is essential for the existence of a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. The teacher who respects and appreciates the diversity of students in the classroom validates and acknowledges the experiences, language, and traditions of linguistically or culturally diverse students. Students who are caring and respectful of others' cultural backgrounds and family structures are more likely to take pride in their own work and the work of their peers.

In the real world, all students will encounter people from diverse backgrounds. Learning about diversity helps students learn more about themselves as they examine the similarities and differences in other cultures and points of view. In turn, this exposure adds to the breadth of knowledge that a good teacher attempts to create. It also allows students to understand why people are different but still able to live in harmony. When a teacher commits to respect and does so with a complete passion for his or her students, only one result is possible: learning for all children. (Midobuche, 1999, p. 81)



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Developing **cultural sensitivity** is one of the first steps towards creating an environment in which diversity is respected. Knowing the nuances and customs of a particular culture, in addition to the artifacts of the culture, is critical to developing cultural sensitivity.

...culture consistently shapes an individual's behavior and reactions to the behaviors of others. Gaining insight into cultural values and habits helps teachers monitor their reactions to student behaviors that they might deem "negative," but that are considered normal or even valued in the student's home culture. Without such reflection, a teacher's implicit assumptions can inadvertently communicate to students a lack of caring. (Bondy & Ross, 2008, p. 56)

The only way to gain fluency, comfort and ease is through genuine relationships in which we learn how to talk to and about people whom we perceive as different, often learning that many of our initial assumptions or judgments were, in fact, erroneous. The goal is not to make differences invisible ("I don't see color"; It's such a good inclusive classroom, you can't tell who the kids with disabilities are") but to develop the language and skills to negotiate diversity. Classrooms cannot feel safe to anyone if discussions of difference are avoided, discouraged, or considered inappropriate. (Sapon-Shevin, 2008, p. 50)

Promoting respect for diversity:

- Create purposeful opportunities for students to collaborate and communicate with peers who are economically, culturally, or linguistically diverse. Provide students with sentence stems or examples of dialogue that demonstrate they are listening and interacting in a respectful manner.
- Facilitate discussions on topics that help students understand the meaning of diversity, such as asking students to discuss their family or community's dress, food, or communication practices. For example, a discussion on communication can help students understand that in some cultures it is considered disrespectful to speak loudly and this might be why some of their classmates choose not to join in loud, lively discussions or celebrations.
- Use moments of conflict between students to discuss the need for tolerance and acceptance. Share stories of culturally diverse individuals who championed for tolerance and overcame challenges.

Refer to this internal resource for additional information:

- Sentence Starters for Teaching Students Accountable Talk
Document provides sentence stems for students to utilize during collaborative conversations with peers.

Refer to these external resources for additional information:

- Article: "Welcoming All Languages" by Linda Christensen
<http://mresaesolendorsement.wikispaces.com/file/view/Welcoming+All+Languages.pdf>
Article explains the connections between one's language and one's cultural identity along with the importance of honoring students' home languages in the classroom.
- Article: "Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy" published by the Center for Nationally Responsive Cultural Educational Systems, SNCCREST
http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf
Article explains how teachers can become culturally responsive in their relationships with students and in their instruction.



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