

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.

PARTIALLY PROFICIENT RATING LEVEL

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: THE TEACHER:

- ***Uses instructional approaches and materials that reflect diverse backgrounds and experiences.***

According to Allen & Butler (1996), "...matching the contextual conditions for learning to the cultural experiences of the learner increases task engagement and hence increases task performance" (p. 317).

A student's culture or background can also refer to the time period in which students are living. The teacher can become familiar with the culture of students by asking the following questions:

- Who are the popular recording artists?
- Where do the students like to gather outside of school?
- What are some of the rivalries among students?
- What are popular terms and phrases used by students?
- What are the communities like in which my students live or have lived?

Refer to this external resource for additional information:

- Article: "Cultural Learning Styles: Should Students' Culture Inform Instructional Choices?" published by Teaching as Leadership
http://teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Related-Readings/DCA_Ch7_2011.pdf

Article discusses how culture impacts the way in which students learn, and how teachers can differentiate instruction based on these learning preferences. *See also examples under Basic Professional Practice, ...used to further student learning.*



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See also Standard III, Element A.

- ***Acknowledges the value of each student’s contributions to the quality of lessons.***

When students experience the classroom as a safe, supportive place where everyone’s contributions and thinking is valued and respected, they can become motivated to engage in the process of learning.

For this type of environment to exist, students must be provided opportunities to contribute to the lesson. The teacher may do this in a variety of ways, such as class discussions, collaborative learning, student writing, and presentations. It is then the manner in which the teacher responds to students during these activities that communicates dismissal or acceptance and respect for their work.

Refer to this internal resource for additional information:

- A Teacher’s Words Matter
Document provides examples of phrases that can communicate to students they are valued and respected for their contributions and thinking.

The teacher who acknowledges the value of each student’s contribution supports students in stretching their thinking by highlighting student progress and creating an environment in which students are encouraged to learn from their peers. The following questions can assist the teacher in creating this type of environment:

- How can I ensure each student has opportunities to contribute to the lesson?
- How will I help each student see that he or she can make a positive difference in the learning of others?
- How will I communicate that I value each student’s unique abilities?

See also Standard II, Element A and Standard III, Element F.

- ***Is welcoming to diverse family structures.***

The teacher who is welcoming to diverse family structures creates an environment in which a student’s family is respected and celebrated. This can be done in a variety of ways. The early childhood or elementary teacher might have students draw pictures of their family to share with classmates, then engage students in a discussion about how even though families may look different or have different members, they are still all families.

Students might also write personal narratives about their family experiences. By providing opportunities for students to share about their families, the teacher can promote an understanding and tolerance for the diversity in family structures.

Using materials such as photographs, illustrations, or texts that explore a variety of family structures can also be an effective way to communicate that all families are important and welcomed.

Books for early childhood or elementary students:

- *The Family Book* by Todd Parr—This book celebrates a variety of family structures in a fun way for young children.
- *Who’s in a Family* by Robert Skutch—This book describes a variety of family structures.
- *Rosie’s Family an Adoption Story* by Lori Rosove—This book describes adoptive families.
- *Families by Ann Morris*—This book can teach students about different family structures around the world.
- *ABC A Family Alphabet Book* by Bobbie Combs—An illustrated ABC book that looks at the lives of gay and lesbian couples and their families.
- *My Family’s Changing* by Pat Thomas—This book explains how divorce or separation can change a family.



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