

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 C

Teachers engage students as individuals with unique interests and strengths.

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

—Chickering & Gamson

Professional practices referenced under each element of the Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Teachers are cumulative. Therefore, for teachers to be proficient in engaging students as individuals, they should be utilizing information from results of student interest inventories or surveys, etc. and implementing lessons that reflect these interests. Students must be encouraged to expand and enhance their learning through the use of challenging questions that are appropriately scaffolded. Teachers also acknowledge students' accomplishments and implement lessons that support all students in participating in class activities.

ACCOMPLISHED AND EXEMPLARY RATING LEVELS

The impact of a proficient implementation of the professional practices referenced in Element C will be students who actively engage in classroom activities, collaborative learning, and group processes. Students will be able to discuss the content and make connections between what they are learning and their interests. They will challenge themselves and encourage their peers to do the same.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: STUDENTS:

- ***Actively engage in classroom activities.***
- ***Discuss content and make connections between current lesson and their interests.***
- ***Encourage fellow students to participate and challenge themselves.***
- ***Engage in collaborative learning and group processes.***

Classroom Examples

Elementary reading, writing, and communicating: Students are working on the Colorado Academic Standard 2: Reading for All Purposes, Grade Level Expectation 1—Strategies are needed to make meaning of various types of literary genres. ***(Implements lesson plans based on: Colorado Academic Standards)***

The teacher is reading aloud a novel to her 3rd-grade students in order to increase reading and vocabulary comprehension. In one passage, the author writes that a wealthy woman “pulled in her skirts” when a poor orphan boy passed her. For students to understand the meaning of this statement, they must make an inference about the author’s intent. The teacher checks for understanding by asking her students, “How do you think this woman felt



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

about the orphan?" *(Asks appropriately challenging questions of all students.)* She provides time for students to process their response, and asks them to write it in their reading journals. *(Gives wait time equitably. Ensures that all students participate in class activities.)* As students write, she circulates to check their thinking. When she sees students using evidence from different places in the text along with the passage she already has pointed out, and combining it with what they know from their own experiences, she stops and acknowledges their work. *(Acknowledges students for their accomplishments.)* Then, she pauses before taking a response from a boy in her class who says, "She didn't like the little boy." The teacher decides to probe a little further, and asks him why he thinks that. *(Encourages students to expand and enhance their learning. Scaffolds questions.)* The student replies, "I could tell she didn't like the little boy because she pulled her skirt away when he walked by. That's because she didn't want to get dirty from his dirty clothes." The teacher nods and intentionally waits another few seconds to let this thought permeate the classroom, *(Gives wait time equitably)* and, to her surprise, the student continues without prompting, "I don't think she was very nice. It's not a very nice way to think because we are all equal." (Walsh & Sattes, 2005, p. 81)

Middle school science: Students are working on Colorado Academic Standard 2: Life Science, Grade Level Expectation 2: The human body is composed of atoms, molecules, cells, tissues, organs, and organ systems that have specific functions and interactions. *(Implements lesson plans based on: Colorado Academic Standards)*

Seventh-grade students are studying the circulatory system. During the unit of study, the teacher makes multiple connections to student interests and experiences. Several students in the class have recently been sick with the flu or colds. The teacher uses this information to explain the purpose of white blood cells and what it can mean when one's white blood cell count is high or low. *(Implements lessons that reflect student interests.)* He also knows from student interest inventories that many students are concerned about health issues, especially childhood obesity. He uses this information to explain the importance of drinking water and eating foods high in iron, as it relates to the work of the red blood cells and circulatory system. He also has students read an article on the impact of weight on the heart. Using information from the article and their own research, students work in collaborative groups to create a persuasive campaign informing teens of the impact of obesity on the circulatory system. Each group creates a goal for its work and assigns each member a specific role within the group. *(Encourages students to expand and enhance their learning. Ensures that all students participate in class activities.)* At the conclusion of the unit, one student group is selected to present its campaign at a school assembly. *(Acknowledges students for their accomplishments.)*

High school science. Students are working on Colorado Academic Standard 1: Physical science, Grade Level Expectation 5: Energy exists in many forms such as mechanical, chemical, electrical, radiant, thermal, and nuclear, that can be quantified and experimentally determined. *(Implements lesson plans based on: Colorado Academic Standards)*

Students are studying forms and transformations of energy. During the unit of study, the teacher makes connections to student interests and experiences through demonstrations and activities *(Implements lessons that reflect student interests.)* The teacher then provides opportunities to observe and measure energy transformations so students can explain that total energy remains constant even as energy changes forms. Students are free to choose opportunities that align best with their interests (e.g., pendulum, roller coaster, emergency light bulbs, emergency radios, fires, engines). She also knows from student interest inventories that many students have interests in design, so she allows students to design a device that accomplishes an everyday task around the home, utilizing different energy transformations. *(Encourages students to expand and enhance their learning. Ensures that all students participate in class activities.)* At the conclusion of the unit, one student per class is selected by their peers and teacher to present their designs at a school assembly. *(Acknowledges students for their accomplishments.)*



Planning/Coaching Questions

- How will I obtain information on my students' interests?
- How will I utilize students' interests when planning lessons and materials students will utilize?
- How will I encourage students to expand their learning?
- How will I ensure students are acknowledged for their accomplishments?
- How will I ensure the questions I ask are challenging for all students?
- How will I plan for the scaffolding of questions?
- How will I ensure all students are provided appropriate wait time?
- How will I ensure all students participate in class activities?



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