CLOSING THE GAP:
CREATING EQUITY IN THE CLASSROOM

HR | K-12 EDUCATION

Hanover Research highlights classroom strategies, tips, and approaches to close the equity gap.

HANOVER RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

School and district leaders grapple with a daunting challenge—they must reform policies and practices that currently contribute to opportunity and achievement gaps. Despite district and school leaders' best efforts, students of color, low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and those who are homeless or in foster care are more likely to fail math and reading and are less likely to graduate. In order to resolve the achievement gap, historical practices that focus on educational equality, treating all students the same, must be replaced with efforts that advance educational equity, ensuring all students have the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success after high school.

The recent reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gives greater responsibility to states and districts to advance equity at the local level. Specifically, ESSA tasks states and districts to:

- Design standards and assessments that develop and measure higher-order thinking skills for all students
- Use multiple measures to assess student and school performance and progress
- Document resource gaps
- Consider the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies to narrow the achievement gap.
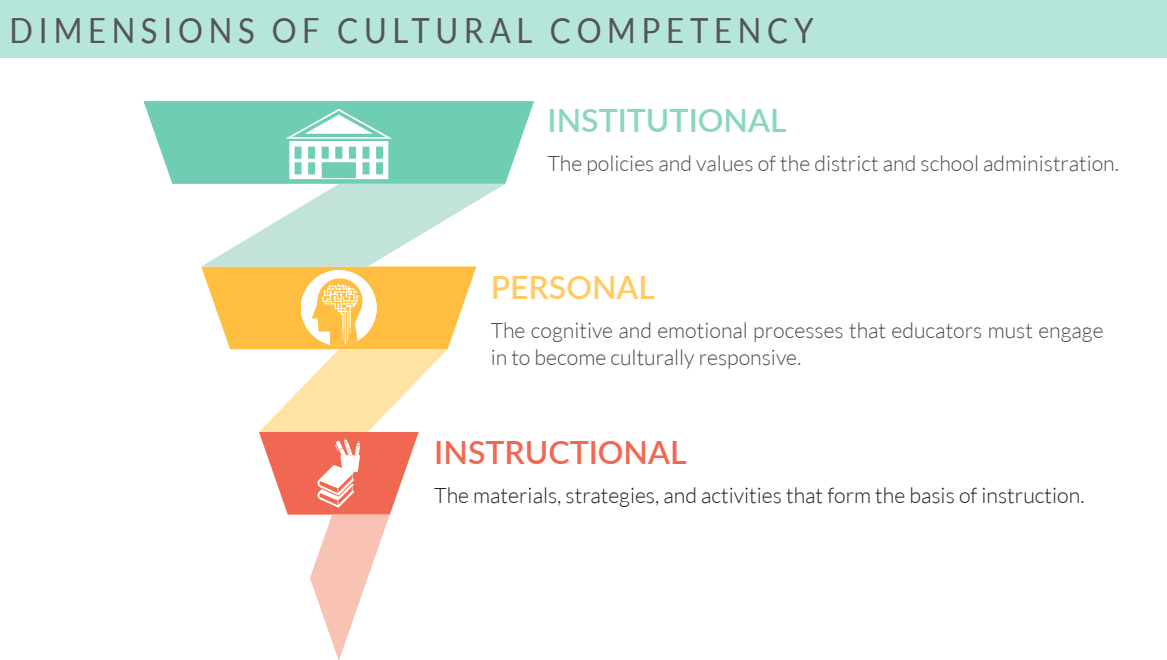
District leaders must craft system-wide reform efforts that address academic expectations, access to learning opportunities, high-quality instruction, resource allocation, and accountability to achieve educational equity. This brief provides strategies, resources, and tools to improve quality of instruction and academic expectations in the classroom.

I. CREATING A CULTURALLY COMPETENT ENVIRONMENT

In an equitable classroom environment, students of all backgrounds (e.g., race, nationality, gender) have the same opportunities to learn and develop their knowledge. To create an equitable learning environment, educators must be culturally competent and possess the ability to communicate and work effectively across cultural lines.

DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY

In fostering cultural competency, there are three distinct dimensions, each of which plays a unique and valuable role in promoting student equity.

DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY

INSTITUTIONAL
The policies and values of the district and school administration.

PERSONAL
The cognitive and emotional processes that educators must engage in to become culturally responsive.

INSTRUCTIONAL
The materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction.

The consideration of multiple cultural perspectives at all three levels is necessary to improve outcomes among diverse learners. At the institutional level, this includes ensuring appropriate policies and values are advocated across the district and school administration. At the personal level, this involves critically reflecting on one's attitudes and beliefs about oneself and others to uncover biases. At the instructional level, this encompasses having materials, activities, and teaching strategies that represent a variety of backgrounds and cultural experiences.

KEY ROLES IN ESTABLISHING AN EQUITABLE ENVIRONMENT

Site administrators and classroom teachers play distinct, but complementary, roles in creating an equitable learning environment.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY ROLES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

	DISTRICT AND SITE ADMINISTRATORS	TEACHERS
VALUING DIVERSITY	• Articulate a culturally proficient vision for the district and the site • Establish standards for holding teachers and staff accountable for the vision	• Teach all subjects from a culturally inclusive perspective • Insist on classroom language and behaviors that value differences
HAVING THE CAPACITY FOR CULTURAL SELF-ASSESSMENT	• Assess the district and site culture • Articulate the cultural expectations for all teachers and staff	• Assess own culture and classroom culture, as well as their effect on students • Support students in discovering their own cultural identities
UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL INTERACTIONS	• Help faculty and staff members learn to distinguish between behavioral problems and cultural differences • Provide training and support systems for conflict management	• Use conflicts as object lessons • Teach students a variety of ways to resolve conflicts
INSTITUTIONALIZING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND ADAPTING TO DIVERSITY	• Examine policies and practices for overt and unintentional discrimination • Change current practices when appropriate • Model and monitor school-wide and classroom practices	• Learn own instructional and interpersonal styles • Develop processes to flex instructional style to meet the needs of all students • Help students understand why things are done in a particular way • Teach students appropriate language for asking questions about others' cultures and sharing details of their own

STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Teachers must establish and maintain behavior standards for respectful treatment in the classroom. Consequences for misbehavior must be implemented consistently and equitably in order to avoid the cultural misunderstandings that sometimes lead to disciplinary interventions.

EQUITABLE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

MONITOR DISCOURSE STYLE

Indirect requests (*"Would you like to let me finish reading the directions?"*) can confuse some children who are used to receiving explicit directives from their parents.

BE SENSITIVE TO HOW DIVERSE CULTURES DEAL WITH CONFLICT

For instance, individuals from certain cultures may avoid open conflict, believing that differences are best worked out quietly. Written exchanges may be preferred over face-to-face conflict resolution.

CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS

If you put students into groups, for example, explain and model the difference between "helping" and "doing the work for" a partner.

EMPHASIZE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT, NOT PUNISHMENT

Classroom rule-breaking decreases when "welcome parties" and other inviting measures are enacted.

II. DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN TEACHERS

The most effective way to develop cultural competency among staff is to provide long-term, sustained professional development that enriches teachers' cultural understanding. Many school districts are employing a variety of innovative professional development opportunities that help teachers evaluate, explore, and expand their instructional approaches.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DIVERSITY TRAINING

Following a staff cultural audit in 2006, **Arlington Public Schools** in Virginia identified a series of recommendations for diversity training for its staff, administration, and teachers. These recommendations targeted ways to change the daily interactions across each group in the school district.

DIVERSITY TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide numerous opportunities for skill-based training, with specific focus on effective communication and cultural considerations inside and outside the classroom.

- Ensure that the training addresses the needs of the constituency base and that the training exercises are relevant and specific to the community.

- Explore the intersections between ethnicity, socio-economic status, culture, and race as dimensions of diversity.

- Investigate managing unconscious bias and assumptions harbored by the district community members. Crafting the filter to identify unconcious biases is key to becoming culturally competent.

- Develop training on communication styles and the delivery of effective feedback when responding to prejudicial or culturally incompetent remarks.

- Strategize ways to cultivate diversity allies, forge partnerships and build relationships across cultures.

- Unpack issues of "unearned privilege" in the workplace and its effect upon the strength of workplace relationships.

- Offer training on "cultural cues" and issues of respect in the workplace.

- Introduce management training for administrators and supervisors to assist with promoting positive employee attitudes.

Source: Arlington Public Schools.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

To promote cultural competence across the district, **Albemarle County Public Schools** in Virginia operates a multi-pronged series of cultural enrichment programs. Through their Office of Community Engagement, the district manages a team of diversity resource teachers, operates a culturally focused artist-in-residence program, and curates cultural community ambassadors.

Diversity Resource Teachers: Each school in the district has a diversity resource teacher that takes responsibility for planning and executing cultural competence workshops and training activities.

Artists-in-Residence: The artists-in-residence specialize in everything from songwriting to West African Dance and visit students at various schools to broaden their cultural horizons and break stereotypes.

Cultural Community Ambassadors: Representatives of various racial and ethnic backgrounds serve as cultural community ambassadors and visit elementary school students to read multicultural picture books and conduct accompanying awareness-building discussions and activities. This program helps students see through stereotypes and accompanying activities help to bridge cultural divides and build cultural awareness.

Source: Albemarle County Public Schools.

III. DIAGNOSTIC: CHECKLIST FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTION

The Checklist for Culturally Responsive Instruction helps classroom teachers improve their instruction approaches by considering differences in social dynamics, learning styles, and life experiences of students.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- ☑ Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom
  Asks students for correct pronunciation of their names; correctly pronounces students' names

- ☑ Uses eye contact with all students
  Makes culturally appropriate eye contact with all students

- ☑ Uses proximity with all students equitably
  Circulates around student work areas to be close to all students

- ☑ Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important
  Smiles, nods head in affirmation; leans toward students

- ☑ Uses class building and team building activities to promote peer support for academic achievement
  Structures academic and social interactions between students

- ☑ Uses random response strategies
  Numbered heads, color-coded cards, equity sticks, calling sticks

- ☑ Uses cooperative learning structures
  Structures opportunities for students to learn with and from their peers (i.e., Think-Pair-Share, Teammates consult, Jigsaw, Pairs Check, Partner A and B, Boggle, Last Word)

- ☑ Structures heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning
  Uses random grouping methods to form small groups; teaches collaborative learning skills to students; provides opportunities for cooperative groups to process/reflect

- ☑ Uses probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer
  Rephrases the question; asks a related question; gives student a hint, clue, or prompt

- ☑ Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions
  Uses affirming, correcting, or probing to acknowledge all students' responses

- ☑ Seeks multiple perspectives
  Validates all perspectives with responses such as: "That's one idea. Does anyone else have another?"

- ☑ Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content
  Uses a variety of approaches to monitor students' understanding throughout instruction (i.e., Thumbs Up, Unison response, One Question Quiz, Envelope Please)

- ☑ Identifies students' current knowledge before instruction
  Uses a variety of methods to assess students' knowledge before instruction (i.e., Word Splash, K-W-L, Anticipation Guide, Brainstorming, Webbing)

- ☑ Uses students' real life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives
  Asks students to reflect upon and discuss the following: "What events/situations occur in your family or neighborhood that require some knowledge of ___?" How does knowing about ___ benefit your interactions in your family, neighborhood, or school?"

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIES

☑ Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion
Arranges seating to facilitate student-student discussion; seeks to facilitate teacher-student discussion

☑ Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students
Displays and uses materials (supplemental books) that reflect all students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds year round; displays products and props from students' home and community background

☑ Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning
Uses multiethnic photos, pictures, and props to illustrate concepts and content; uses appropriate technology to illustrate concepts and content

☑ Learns, uses, and displays some words in students' heritage language
Posts some content words or phrases in students' heritage languages; uses some words or phrases from students' heritage language in the classroom

☑ Models use of graphic organizers
Uses a variety of graphic organizers during instruction; encourages students to identify and use the task appropriate graphic organizer by modeling

FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

☑ Uses wait time
Pauses at least 3-5 seconds to consider the student's response before affirming, correcting, or probing; pauses following a student's response to allow other students to consider their reactions, responses and extensions

☑ Asks students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction
Asks students to indicate the learning activities that are effective in helping them to learn; uses interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to gather feedback from students; uses exit cards to gather feedback

☑ Provides students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion
Evaluates student work by providing performance criteria (i.e., rubrics, exemplars, anchor papers)

☑ Gives students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance
Confers with students to provide feedback to improve performance; provides opportunities for students to use peer reviews; provides written feedback that allows students to revise and improve their work

☑ Provides multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation
Allows students to revise work based on teacher feedback; encourages and structures opportunities for students to provide feedback to peers based on an established standard

☑ Explains and models positive self-talk
Explains the importance of positive self-talk and how positive self-talk leads to positive outcomes

☑ Asks higher-order questions equitably of all students
Asks analysis questions; asks synthesis questions; asks evaluation questions; poses higher order questions and uses a random method for calling on students; provides think time for all students before asking for responses

☑ Provides individual help to all students
Ensures all students receive individual help

Source: Selections from Montgomery County Public Schools Equity Initiatives Unit.

SOURCE LIST

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT HANOVER RESEARCH

Hanover Research provides high-quality, custom research and analytics through a cost effective model that helps clients make informed decisions, identify and seize opportunities, and heighten their effectiveness.

THE HANOVER APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Hanover Research offers an integrated and customized approach to evaluating educational equity. The issue of educational equity and cultural responsiveness is unique to each K-12 organization, and Hanover's team of experts will recommend a tailored approach best suited for the individual organization. Hanover's unique year-long partnership model allows for each educational equity project to build off of the previous one, producing more actionable results and more detailed insights.

HANOVER'S CORE CAPABILITIES

PRIMARY RESEARCH — Survey design, administration, and analysis; qualitative data coding; in-depth interviews; online and onsite focus groups; digital ethnography

SECONDARY RESEARCH — Literature review; best practices; environmental scan; benchmarking; demographic analysis

DATA ANALYSIS — Descriptive and predictive analytics, including: student segmentation; linear regression; data mining; decision simulation; data visualization
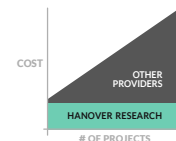
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