



# A Brief Guide to Making Your Schools More Culturally Responsive

## What is culturally responsive education?

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education is a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple forms of diversity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability) are recognized, understood, and regarded as indispensable sources of knowledge for rigorous teaching and learning. CRSE uses educational strategies that leverage the various aspects of students' identities, including the rich cultural, racial, historical, linguistic characteristics of students to provide mirrors that reflect the greatness of who their people are and windows into the world that allow students to connect across cultures.

## What is this document and who is it for?

This document was developed to provide guidance on how to make your school and district more culturally responsive. Through examples and resources, this document concretely outlines ways to use research and/or policy to advance any of the following four aspects of culturally responsive education in your school: Curriculum; School climate; Recruitment, retention and retainment of teachers and staff; and Parent and family engagement. Having a culturally responsive education system is an intensive, ongoing and long-term effort that requires transformative changes at all levels, including district level intervention. Some examples of how stakeholders at various levels can contribute to creating a culturally responsive education system are provided in the [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework](#) created by the NY State Education Department.

This document can serve as guidance for multiple stakeholders in a school or district, including: parents, students, community organizations, advocacy groups, principals, teachers, district consultants, district leadership and consultants.

## How do I use this?

This document covers four major categories in which schools and districts can implement culturally responsive practice. Each section provides a definition of that category, examples of research that could be conducted to investigate that category, and examples of school or district policies that could advance culturally responsive practice in that area. The resource section has a range of resources that can expand your exposure to culturally responsive practices and networks.

This tool is intended to be used as a resource to get started, but is by no means an exhaustive list of how to make your school culturally responsive.

# Curriculum and Instruction



Culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE) in curriculum should strengthen student-teacher relationships and allow students to see themselves reflected and connected to the content they are learning. Culturally responsive curriculum should value and honor all cultures and ethnicities, and draw from and respond to the identities of the students in the classroom.

## Research Options

- Use the Metro Center's [Culturally Responsive Education Curriculum Scorecard](#) to assess how culturally responsive your current curriculum is
- Use a [Classroom Library Questionnaire](#) to analyze the strengths and gaps in your classroom library

## Policy Recommendations

- Implement new courses that focus specifically on the histories of diverse cultures:
  - Allow students to select from different courses that can count for a core course requirement (ie. course focusing on Latin America, Caribbean, African American history/culture, etc. for an English or Social Studies requirement)
  - Create elective courses that students can opt into (for examples of what other states have done see [Course Options](#) in references section)
  - Require coursework in diverse cultures/histories for high school graduation
- Convene a group of experts and stakeholders (teachers, students, university faculty, etc.) to assess and [revamp curriculum in core courses](#) to integrate CRE approach and practices into all/multiple subjects
- Create [CRE standards](#) that can be used in observing and evaluating teachers
- Change teacher schedules to include professional development and collaborative planning time so they can infuse culturally responsive practices such as: group work to build community, student-teacher relationships, interactive learning, student-driven learning, complex thinking
- Conduct a survey of students regarding their interests and what they want to learn about, in order to use student voice to inform and improve teacher practices.
- Create opportunities for teachers, parents and community members to [co-design and co-teach curricular units](#)

Click [Curriculum](#) to explore resources that can help create CRE curriculum and pedagogy.

# School Climate



School climate refers to the way in which the culture of the school impacts students' sense of belonging and security. A culturally responsive-sustaining school is a safe space for students and teachers of all backgrounds and identities, especially for youth that have been historically marginalized in schools and in society.

## Research Options

- Take a district wide approach and contact [Innovations in Equity and Systemic Change](#) or another organization to help assess and eliminate [disproportionality](#)
- Use suspension data that is publicly available from the US Education Department's [Office of Civil Rights](#) to analyze trends in discipline infractions and consequences
- Disaggregate suspension data by race/ethnicity/gender/special education to determine changes over time and in disproportionality
- Create and disseminate a school climate survey that measures teachers', students' and staff attitudes toward cultural competence, bullying, discipline, and other topics related to school climate (see [USDOE survey](#) for an example)
- Request and analyze data from your police department to critically consider how police in schools have impacted the school to prison pipeline. Some areas to analyze include, but are not limited to: [charges filed, summonses issued, arrest rate, use of force, use of restraint, EMS called](#)
- Conduct a [School Climate Walk](#) with school staff, parents and students to assess the school culture and climate

## Policy Recommendations

- [Change the code of conduct](#) to eliminate the major sources of disproportionality
- Include [school climate measures](#) in ESSA evaluation metrics for schools and districts
- implement positive discipline practices as an alternative to punitive discipline
  - Hire [Restorative Justice/Peace Circle Coordinators](#) to prioritize school-wide social and emotional well being
  - Implement [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#) which is a three tiered approach to supporting students. This include practices such as encouraging students to attend cognitive therapy and movement breaks.
  - Implement [Trauma-Sensitive Practices](#)
- Divest from school police officers and instead, invest in personnel who are [trained to support youth development](#), such as school counselors and social workers
- Expand and invest in access to mental health services inside schools
- [Pass policies that protect and support for students and families](#) from ICE arrests on and around the school grounds, such as [requiring ICE to have approval from the school board](#) and a judicial warrant before entering the premises
- Require [guidance interventions](#) before using suspension as a punishment.

Click [School climate](#) to find resources for making your school climate culturally responsive.

# Recruitment, Retention & Training of Staff



Implicit and overt bias manifest in classrooms every day through educators' expectations and treatment of students of color, inhibiting the engagement and academic achievement of students from marginalized identities. Deliberate district and school policies can turn this around by developing the conditions in which school staff become aware of their own cultural conditioning, shift their mindsets, and develop instructional and relational skills to engage and challenge students of diverse backgrounds and identities. Research shows that academic outcomes are improved when students have [teachers of their same background](#), and when they develop [positive concepts of their ethnic identity](#). Below are strategies that schools and districts can use to build a culturally responsive staff.

## Research Options

- Conduct a [survey](#) of teachers'/principals' comfort and capacity talking about race and identity in the classroom, to identify their strengths and challenges
- Conduct an [analysis](#) of the numbers and distribution of teachers of color in the district, as well as retention and promotion rates
- Conduct a survey and/or focus groups of teachers of color to identify the impediments and encouragements to retention and advancement in the district
- Conduct an analysis of courses offered for professional development credit in the district: How many courses related to culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum and school climate are offered? What are the qualifications of the instructors? What are the demographics of who is taking those courses and who is not?
- Conduct a survey of the teacher education programs serving your district: What courses are offered related to CRSE pedagogy, curriculum and school climate?

## Policy Recommendations

- Review [these practices](#) for recruiting and supporting a diverse teaching staff
- Require training and demonstrated competency in CRSE for teacher certification, and for promotion to leadership and administrative positions
- Create [teacher residency programs](#) to recruit, train and support teachers of color
- Create [Grow-Your-Own](#) program to recruit and support community members to become certified teachers
- Review recruitment, interview, hiring and promotion policies to eliminate biases
- Offer CRE-related trainings during mandatory PD days (ex: [Denver](#), [NYC](#))
- Organize [weekly discussion groups](#) for teachers to talk about race, class and other identities, and develop cultural proficiency

Click [Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Training](#) to find resources for making your school climate culturally responsive

# Parent and Family Engagement



Schools can move from traditional parent engagement to culturally responsive family engagement by rethinking preconceived notions of parents' value and roles, and providing opportunities for school staff and parents to build authentic relationships as equal partners. Parent engagement must happen on parent terms and turf - in their community, at the times they are available, in their language, etc - and not just on the school's terms and turf. The strategies below can help schools to move in that direction.

## Research Options

- Conduct a [School Climate Walk](#) with school staff, parents and students to assess whether the school is a welcoming environment for parents, from the front desk to the front office to the classroom
- Conduct a survey of parents to discover their priorities and concerns, and identify gaps in communication
- Convene parents and school staff to discuss the [Four Types of Family-School Partnerships](#) and determine which type your school is, and how to move it toward the partnership school model

## Policy Recommendations

- Create an Office of Translation and Interpretation within the district to centralize access to interpreters and support schools with engaging multilingual families
- Implement research-based model programs of parent engagement such as:
  - [Parent-Teacher Home Visits](#)
  - [Academic Parent-Teacher Teams](#)
  - [Abriendo Puertas](#)
  - [Parent Mentor Program](#)
- Use Title 1 funds to train and stipend multilingual parents to provide translation and interpretation for other parents
- Design and offer professional development workshops on research-based, culturally responsive parent engagement
- Create [Grow-Your-Own](#) program to recruit and support parents and community members to become certified teachers
- Partner with community organizations or local leaders to conduct community tours for school staff, where they get out into the neighborhood, become familiar with local institutions, meet local leaders, and learn about the local history and culture
- Set aside weekly time for teachers to communicate with parents
- Ensure that parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences are held at different times of day to accommodate parents' work schedules, and offer translation, food, child care, and assistance with transportation
- Include family engagement measures in ESSA evaluation metrics

Click [Parent and Family Engagement](#) to find resources for developing culturally responsive parent engagement.

# Resources



## Curriculum

### Reading Materials

- [Multicultural Experiential Exercises](#)
- [Selecting Culturally Appropriate Children's Books in Languages Other than English](#)
- Refer to the resources in [this toolkit](#) for further information
- [Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence \(CREDE\)](#)

### Ethnic Studies Courses

- [Integration of CRE into Oregon Curriculum](#)
- [Tucson Mexican-American Studies Department](#)
- [San Francisco Unified School District Ethnic Studies Program](#)
- [Providence Rhode Island Ethnic Studies](#)

## School Climate

- Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles ([link](#))
- Positive Behavioral Interventions Supports (PBIS) and the Responsive Classroom Approach ([link](#))
- National School Climate Center ([link](#))
- [Black Lives Matter at School Week](#)

## Teacher Recruitment

- [Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color](#)
- [Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse, High-Quality Teacher Workforce](#)
- The Teacher Residency: An Innovative Model for Preparing Teacher ([link](#))
- Study Finds Students Of All Races Prefer Students Of Color ([link](#))
- District-Wide Approach to Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices In the Boston Public Schools ([link](#))
- Addressing Disproportionality Through the Creation of Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving Teams ([link](#))

## Parent and Family Engagement

- The Family Leadership Self-Assessment Rubric: An Indicator Tool for Schools Districts ([link](#))
- The Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships ([link](#))
- [A Cord of Three Strands](#) and [Natural Allies](#) by Soo Hong ([link](#) and [link](#))

For more information, contact the NYU Metro Center's Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC) at [nyu-ejroc@nyu.edu](mailto:nyu-ejroc@nyu.edu).