

Culturally Sustaining Practices in Four Critical Levels – Indicators and Evidence

Culturally Sustaining Schools

“A culturally sustaining school provides college and career readiness in an environment that is academically supportive, is asset-conscious and fosters positive cultural identity.”

– Dr. Paula Johnson, IDRA EAC-South

Culturally Sustaining Leadership

“The culturally sustaining campus leader sets standards and expectations for high academic success regardless of perceived performance abilities. This means that he or she leads the school in creating an academic environment free from implicit bias toward underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.”

– Dr. Paula Johnson, IDRA EAC-South



Universal Campus Goals

The culturally sustaining school's goals are the following.

1. Universal access to a safe and secure campus culture where marginalized students are safe from the following.
 - Implicit and explicit biases in educators.
 - Implicit and explicit biases in all school staff (clerical, transportation, cafeteria, custodial).
 - Racially motivated incidences involving any school employee from clerical to leadership.
 - Negative family and community relationships with school employees.
 - Microaggressions.
2. Safe and secure campus climate must be quantified through surveys and/or yearly focus groups collected by outside partners. These issues are codified in campus documents and addressed through transparent incident reporting, professional development, accountable leadership and appropriate resolution practices (e.g., restorative justice).
3. Access and support to rigorous college preparatory classes for *all* students as evidenced by (a) high college and career readiness rates; (b) high completion rates; and (c) access to appropriate and high supports for success in college and career readiness. Examples of classes include dual credit, AP/IB, and early college high schools.
4. Universal access to culturally relevant pedagogy that foment positive cultural identities.
5. Access to an educational environment that is free from implicit and explicit racial/ethnic and gender biases as evidenced by high performance of marginalized students and low exclusionary discipline rates for all students.
6. High student achievement rates in state accountability (the most basic outcome).



Leadership Goals

1. Full implementation of culturally sustaining practices as evidenced by:
 - Percentage of *all* leadership trained in culturally sustaining practices (i.e., board members, superintendents, principals, assistant principals, central office, post-secondary deans of school of education and university presidents)
 - Explicit communication to *all* staff of equity vision, practices and indicators.
 - Percentage of instructional coaches trained in culturally sustaining practices.
 - Percentage of teachers trained in culturally sustaining practices.
 - Teacher beliefs that *all* students are capable of successful college and career readiness in a manner that is not deficit based nor viewed through implicit biases.
 - Culturally relative practices monitored as part of teacher evaluations.
 - Teacher inclusion of culturally sustaining pedagogy that speaks to student's history, contributions and community struggles.
 - Support for teachers to implement culturally sustaining practices.
 - Full communication with *all* families of equity expectations, culturally sustaining practices, procedures for reporting incidents and disciplinary/restorative measures for staff.
2. Families and caregivers of marginalized students have access to:
 - Decisions surrounding culturally sustaining pedagogy.
 - Lesson planning and lesson inclusion concerning community. contributions to historical and current events.
 - Surveys concerning faculty and staff biases.
3. Ensuring high rates in recruiting, hiring and retaining of teachers of color and ensuring high rates of teachers who are versed in culturally sustaining pedagogy as evidenced by:
 - Collaborative recruitment efforts with teacher programs across the state that includes and highlights historically Black colleges and universities.
 - Mentoring practices for new recruits in culturally sustaining pedagogy.
 - Support for new teachers in establishing positive community relationships.
 - Maintaining a positive, asset-based, bias-free culture on campus toward all teachers and students

Culturally Sustaining Educators

“Experiences educators provide have the most impact on students and ultimately define the nature of that relationship. And in the case of students of color those experience must be provided by educators who understand the entirety of our students’ experiences.”

– Dr. Paula Johnson, IDRA EAC-South

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

“Culturally sustaining pedagogy must be transformative and move beyond the multicultural practices of inclusion. Culturally sustaining pedagogy must build leadership and pedagogical practices by thorough examinations of power dynamics and privilege.

– Dr. Paula Johnson, IDRA EAC-South

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Basic Understanding

Educators must have a basic Understanding of traditional multicultural approaches and culturally sustaining practices from least to most effective.

- **Contributions Approach:** “Colloquially, this is known as the ‘heroes and holidays’ approach Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks during Black History Month” (Stairs, et al., 2012).
- **Additive Approach:** This approach expands by creating units concerning African American figures, scientists or civil rights activists. For students of color, the practice of isolating figures and creating lesson or units “reinforces the notion... that ethnic minorities are not integral parts of mainstream U.S. society” (Banks & Banks, 2012).
- **Transformation Approach:** This approach takes multiple events, issues, narratives or concepts and asks students to examine perspectives from different identities.
- **Social Action Approach:** Here, students “acquire the knowledge and commitments needed to make reflective decisions and to take personal, social and civic action to promote democracy and democratic living” (Banks & Banks, 2012).

Educators must understand the following critical race theory concepts that affect student outcomes.

- Educators must challenge their own sense of privilege.
- Educators can only understand the need for high support by examining their own privilege and ideas of a *simplistic meritocracy*.
- Educators must have high expectations for all students.
- Educators must explicitly discuss issues of power and privilege in the classroom.
- Educators help students make connections between their community, national and global identities.
- Educators see teaching as “pulling knowledge out” therefore validating common heritage.
- Educators must demonstrate an understanding of students’ cultural background.

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Observable Pedagogies

Culturally sustaining pedagogy must have the following observable practices across all content areas at all grade levels.

Classroom Relationships

- The teacher demonstrates an ethic of care (e.g., equitable relationships, bonding).
- The teacher communicates high expectations for all students.
- The teacher creates a learning atmosphere that engenders respect for one another and toward diverse populations.
- Students work together productively.

Family and Community Collaboration

Collaborations must reflect genuine authentic recognition of how privilege and power has historically affected school/family dynamics.

- The teacher establishes genuine partnerships (equitable relationships) with family/caregivers.
- The teacher reaches out to meet families in positive, non-traditional ways.
- The teacher encourages family/caregiver’s involvement.
- The teacher intentionally learns about families’ and communities’ linguistic and cultural knowledge and expertise to support student learning.

Instructional Practices

Teacher’s instructional practices must reflect learnings concerning power and privilege.

- Instruction is contextualized in students’ lives, experiences and abilities.
- Students engage in active, hands-on, meaningful skills-based learning tasks, including inquiry-based and place-based learning.
- The teacher focuses on developing students’ academic language.
- The teacher uses instructional techniques that scaffold student learning.
- The teacher focuses on building assets instead of utilizing deficit thinking.

Curriculum and Assessment Practices

- The curriculum and planned learning experiences provide opportunities for the inclusion of issues important to the classroom, school and community, including place-based learning.
- The curriculum and planned learning experiences incorporate opportunities to study dynamics of power and privilege in order to confront and dispel negative stereotypes and bias.
- The curriculum and planned learning experiences integrate and provide opportunities for the expression of diverse perspectives.