

Develop an intercultural mindset

Our students live and will work – as we do – in an increasingly diverse society. Ethnic and cultural diversity in Minnesota is increasing. Immigration is bringing new languages and cultures into our communities. Gender identity, expression and sexual orientation has evolved, along with family structures. Students with special needs are being included in general education classrooms more frequently.

The challenge for educators is to meet students' diverse educational needs while preparing them to understand and appreciate differences in culture, learning style, interests and values. Here are some suggestions:

- Understand that everyone has biases, both conscious and unconscious. Be willing to self-reflect, to become aware of these biases and how they might affect your students and your classroom and school culture. Seek out colleagues who have undertaken the same journey and work together to extend this awareness throughout your building.
- Treat students as individuals through a lens of equity. It is important to assess the needs of students individually so each can develop their potential.
- Affirm and validate students' ethnic experiences. Do not leave it up to students to share. Ignite your curiosity and professional growth in personal study and research to ensure diverse cultures are embedded into your curriculum all year, reflecting the contributions of people of color in all curricular areas.
- Recognize and understand cultural differences. Be aware that such cultural elements as clothing, time, space, gestures, ethics, values, religion, holidays, rights and duties are expressed differently by people in cultures different than your own. Make an effort to learn more about your students' cultures by reading, taking classes and talking to people from the groups represented in your classroom.
- Recognize and make the effort to understand the complex nature of gender and sexual orientation. Find professional development opportunities to grow your awareness in order to make your classroom and building culture brave and nurturing.
- Make sure your expectations are the same for students of all gender identities and expressions. Challenge all your students. Make sure they get many opportunities to interact in a variety of ways.
- Vary your teaching style. Students bring different experiences and learning styles to your classroom, so use a variety of approaches to be sure everyone is successful.
- Familiarize yourself with your district's harassment policies. Every district is required to have policies on racial and sexual harassment.
- Watch for signs of bullying in your classroom, hallways and playgrounds. Cultural differences, including immigration status, religious practices, gender identity and sexual orientation, often result in physical or emotional bullying. Your school is required by state law to have a bullying prevention and intervention plan, which includes training for educators and guidelines to follow when bullying incidents are reported.

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Check out these resources:

- American Federation of Teachers, www.aft.org
- Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org
- Education Minnesota, www.educationminnesota.org
- IDEA Partnership, www.ideapartnership.org
- Minnesota Department of Education's Special Education page, <http://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/sped>
- National Association for Gifted Children, www.nagc.org
- National Education Association, www.nea.org
- Special Education Resources on the Internet, www.seriweb.com
- Special Education Network, www.specialednet.com
- PACER Center, www.pacer.org
- Toolkit for safe and supportive schools for transgender and gender non-conforming students, <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe>