

# EXPANDING THE VISION OF REIMAGINE MINNESOTA:

A Collective Education Roadmap for Action

A PARTNERSHIP EFFORT WITH:



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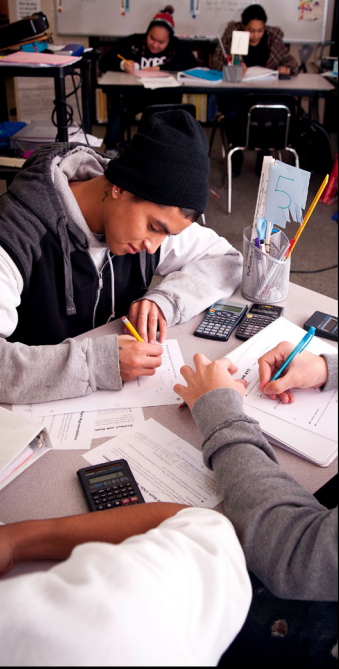


SAINT PAUL  
& MINNESOTA  
FOUNDATION



Greater Twin Cities  
United Way





## WHAT IF EVERY CHILD, REGARDLESS OF RACE, POVERTY STATUS, OR ZIP CODE, COULD ACCESS A QUALITY K-12 EDUCATION?

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What if that quality education created a foundation upon which every child was poised to reach their fullest potential?

We know Minnesota is among the worst in the nation for racial disparities in K-12 education. We also know we can't grant our way out of this crisis. *Expanding the Vision of Reimagine Minnesota: A Collective Education Roadmap for Action* provides evidence-based solutions that have the potential to be transformational for our community.

Read, learn, and join us in transforming our K-12 education to help every child reach their fullest potential.





## Why now?

This report comes at a time of urgent public discourse about the need to identify evidence-based solutions to Minnesota's unacceptable gaps in educational equity.

We've read other reports, billboards, and op-eds that prove the challenge is real. However, instead of simply examining the problem, we set out to build on the perspectives of those most proximate to the issues to help drive solutions. Namely, parents, families, teachers, school leaders, and superintendents.

## What's Reimagine Minnesota?

Since 2016, a group of superintendents from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts has been engaging in a process to reimagine the future of education in Minnesota. As part of that process, the superintendents held a series of events at which they gathered input from more than 3,000 students, parents, cultural representatives, community members, business leaders, and other education stakeholders, all of whom were invited to conceptualize a new model of education that is designed for the success of all students. Their voices informed a report issued in 2018 called *Reimagine Minnesota: A Collective Education Roadmap for Action*.

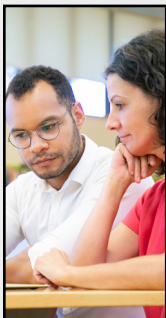
In their roadmap, the superintendents proposed the framework of a collective action plan to ensure that all students receive an equitable, integrated, and excellent education. This report builds on their work. Produced by the University of Minnesota's College of Education & Human Development in partnership with The Minneapolis Foundation, the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, and Greater Twin Cities United Way, it provides overviews of current research and practical recommendations related to themes raised in the original *Reimagine Minnesota* roadmap.

# KEY REPORT TAKEAWAYS



## Eliminate adult behaviors that lead to disproportionality.

Improving educational equity in Minnesota begins with adults. Transformative change is possible only when all the adults working in schools—including teachers, administrators, and other staff members—have invested in their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward building equitable educational experiences for all children. [Read more in Adult Behaviors.](#)



## Provide professional learning for educators and administrators to create culturally responsive and inclusive schools.

Educators need professional learning and ongoing guidance in order to create culturally responsive spaces and learning experiences for students. This should include:

- The history of our educational system
- Opportunities to reflect on their own assumptions about students, parents, and communities
- Opportunities to engage with the experiences of marginalized students

School administrators should create an equity vision and plan and perform district-wide equity audits. They should align leadership and educator activities such as teacher hiring, observations and mentoring, curriculum choice and development, assessment, data analysis, professional learning, and communication with and in support of the equity vision. [Read more in Cultural Competence.](#)



### 3

Elevate student voices and leadership and ensure students feel engaged in their school culture and environment.

Students learn best when they have opportunities to make connections between new information, their prior knowledge, and their lived experiences. Teachers need the time to create lessons and classrooms that fulfill those criteria.

[Read more in Student Voice.](#)



### 4

Create a common vision for personalized education and evidence-based models that meet the needs of diverse students.

Personalized learning using a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework has the potential to address educational inequities when implemented effectively and with fidelity. [Read more in Personalized Education.](#)

- Teachers need to be educated on this framework.
- Co-teaching and co-planning time, flexible classroom and school schedules, and technology will enable success.



## 5 Build bridges between schools, families, and communities.

Students need the opportunity to problem-solve and contribute to school decisions. [Read more in Cultural Competence.](#)

Educators need to go beyond inviting people into the school and instead be actively engaged in community conversations and spaces. [Read more in Community Bridges.](#)

Schools should create multiple formal and informal opportunities for families to share how they support their children's learning and learn about instructional goals. [Read more in Community Bridges.](#)



## 6 Invest in strategies to recruit and retain teachers of color.

Recruitment of more teachers of color, and significant investments in the induction of new teachers—including mentoring programs—is essential. [Read more in Recruitment and Retention.](#)

## 7 Restructure statewide education funding in a manner that ensures equity, access, and opportunity for all students.

Minnesota's school finance system meets many aspects of fairness goals used by scholars, although provisions to address student need are muted in metropolitan schools because of higher labor costs.

Results neutrality should be an additional criterion in school financing. We should not be able to predict how well a child performs based on their race, poverty status, or ZIP code.

Investing in afterschool programs, activities, and transportation results in improved outcomes. [Read more in School Finance.](#)



## Focus on the whole child and support students and adults to develop social and emotional learning skills.

Students' academic and cognitive development occurs alongside their social, cultural, and identity development. These threads are intertwined, and none can be neglected if we want to improve student outcomes. [Read more in Cultural Competence.](#)

All adults working in schools need professional learning on social and emotional learning (SEL). [Read more in Social & Emotional Learning.](#) Schools should:

- Set clear expectations
- Embed SEL activities into everyday teaching and learning
- Create safe, supportive, welcoming environments that encourage the use of appropriate SEL skills



## Effective implementation is critical for progress. Support school systems to implement evidence-based practices and sustain and/or scale up innovations over time.

The growing field of implementation science is revealing many barriers to the effective implementation of evidence-based practices in schools. If we don't adopt new methods into routine practice, the expected outcomes will not occur.

An effective implementation process looks like this:

- Step One: An implementation team assesses a school's readiness to make changes.
- Step Two: Resources are acquired or repurposed and staff is prepared.
- Step Three: Team helps develop staff competencies required by the evidence-based practices, helps administrators adjust organization roles and functions, and helps all leaders support the process of using the practices.
- Step Four: New practices become the standard of work and are embedded as business as usual.

Done well, this process can take several years. [Read more in A Note on Implementation Science.](#)



## Meet the Researchers

*About the Educational Equity Resource Center at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development*

The University of Minnesota recognizes that many outside factors affect academic performance, such as poverty, housing, health, and hunger. That's why over 130 University experts are focused on developing new ideas to narrow gaps and increase educational equity.

Across all of their campuses, researchers, faculty, staff, and students collaborate with each other and Minnesota communities to discover methods that meet the unique needs of each student, school, and community. Some of their work includes:

- Exploring the challenges of child and youth development to understand resiliency
- Working with communities to create solutions tailored to their specific needs
- Helping families incorporate ideas at home, including providing nutritious meals

**READ THE FULL REPORT**



# EXPANDING THE VISION OF **REIMAGINE MINNESOTA:**

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A Collective Education Roadmap for Action



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# Why Reimagine Minnesota?

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The Minneapolis Foundation, the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, Greater Twin Cities United Way, and the College of Education and Human Development Educational Equity Resource Center have partnered on educational endeavors to address persistent challenges in achieving education equity across the state, including the 2016 and 2017 Education Equity in Action Convenings.

Recent conversations have renewed our shared commitments to educational equity and a focus for discussion on identifying evidence-based solutions. This focus has been shaped in part by the ongoing lawsuit, *Cruz-Guzmán v. State of Minnesota*, filed in 2015. As summarized by the ACLU, the plaintiffs assert that “segregation in the Saint Paul and Minneapolis school districts has maintained an unfair and substandard educational environment for racial- and ethnic-minority students. They argue for disaggregation of the school districts to combat inferior learning environments and establish equal-opportunity education.”<sup>1</sup>

Since 2016, a group of superintendents with the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) engaged in a process to reimagine the future of education in Minnesota. They acknowledge the changing demographic composition of the state and the implications for the state’s workforce. They argue, “all students and all Minnesotans will reap enormous benefits when we create lasting equity, integration and excellence in our education system. Aside from fulfilling the moral and constitutional imperative of equal opportunity for all, ensuring an equitable, integrated and excellent education for all students will secure the highly skilled workforce Minnesota needs to compete in the rapidly changing global economy.”<sup>2</sup>

As the superintendents set out to create a plan and recommendations for new local and statewide policies and practices, they knew that listening to community voices would be critically important. In 2017, they held a series of events at which they gathered input from more than 3,000 students, parents, cultural representatives, business leaders, and other community members, all of whom were invited to conceptualize a new model of education designed for the success of all students. They leveraged the World Café model of engagement, hosting a dozen community conversations that were designed to create a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in real-life situations. At these events, participants contributed more than 10,000 responses and suggestions about what could and should be done to ensure that all students in Minnesota receive an equitable, integrated, and excellent education.

These voices were a key influence on the superintendents’ work, which led to the development of a broad and thoughtful report. Issued in 2018, ***Reimagine Minnesota: A Collective Education Roadmap for Action*** lays out a framework to “ensure the constitutionally guaranteed right to an adequate education of all students by creating a comprehensive collective action plan to address integration, access, opportunity, and educational achievement.”<sup>2</sup>

We accepted the invitation to collaborate with The Minneapolis Foundation, the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, Greater Twin Cities United Way, and AMSD, to expand on the action strategies and steps already identified in the Reimagine Minnesota report, to provide an empirical foundation, and ideally improve the chances of successful implementation. With a group of engaged scholars and researchers from the University of Minnesota, this report extends the work begun in Reimagine Minnesota by identifying the evidence base for recommended practices, and expands the pool of recommended strategies. We do so in the spirit of the land-grant mission of the University of Minnesota, but also as Minnesota educators, parents, and residents.

The team from the University consists of educational scholars and researchers, including those with K-12 teaching and school leadership experience. All work with Minnesota schools and educators. The researchers bring a wide range of expertise linked by knowledge of:

- educational equity;
- evidence-based strategies and the characteristics that make them successful given unique local contexts, needs, and preferences;
- implementation science and continuous improvement approaches; and
- the many ecologies of student success, including teacher development, school leadership, parent and community engagement, and the state educational policy environment.

Many of the topics addressed by the UMN team overlap with and include multiple Reimagine Minnesota strategies, as many aspects of schooling are interdependent. In this report, we:

- identify relevant themes and theories addressing each strategy area,
- clarify the evidence-basis for the strategy,
- describe evidence-based interventions or approaches for the strategy,
- identify the tailoring variables to support successful implementation given local contexts, and
- recommend specific steps to support local adoption.

This report is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of the challenges or approaches to achieving educational equity. It was guided by issues raised in the 2018 Reimagine Minnesota report. There are issues and topics that are not fully addressed in these efforts, but remain important, and in some cases, critical.

This report does not explicitly direct action toward achieving greater outcomes in early childhood development and education – we do acknowledge the critical periods of prenatal care and infancy, early childhood screening, and access to high quality early childhood education curriculum and instruction. Nearly all of the discussions and recommendations in this report can be extended from early childhood through adulthood and life-long learning endeavors.

This report does not explicitly direct action toward meeting the needs of emerging multilingual learners or students with disabilities. We acknowledge the unique learning needs of many students in our care, with diverse backgrounds, including some with limited or interrupted formal educational experiences, and a wide range of literacy skills in native languages and in English. Some students with disabilities, including some emerging multilingual learners, may or may not be adequately assessed nor provided optimal access to appropriate learning opportunities. Many of the discussions and recommendations in this report are appropriate for students with unique learning needs, and we recognize that in some cases, such students are not fairly treated due to implicit biases and inappropriate identification, assessment, and placement.

Here, we provide a few opportunities to dive more deeply into areas of common interest across our research agendas and that of Reimagine Minnesota. There is certainly much more that can be done, but as we build out our areas of expertise and enhance our understanding, we can begin to design practices and policies that are more equity focused with increased likelihood to maximize the success of students with the greatest needs. We too are committed to create lasting equity and excellence in education for all students.



# A Note on Implementation Science

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By now, most educators and education leaders have been introduced to the practices of implementation science. They are commonly discussed in intervention and implementation-focused research, including the development and success of professional learning communities. They are utilized in the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Regional Centers of Excellence. They are inherent in evidence-based continuous improvement processes.

Implementation science is the study of methods of adopting evidence into routine practice for the purpose of continuous improvement. It focuses on the challenges and processes of implementation and integration of evidence-based practice and policy design. It addresses the fact that often, what we know does not inform what we do. In the spirit of intentionality, it includes the identification of barriers that hinder and enablers that support implementation.

Common barriers to implementation include limited knowledge, experience, resources, leadership, support, as well as low confidence, pride, biases, and others.

Common enablers of implementation include leadership support, the presence of a champion for the cause, cross-sectional involvement (teachers, students, families, after-school partners), local wisdom, and commitment to inclusion of diverse views and experiences – other ways of knowing and doing. In the context of implementation science, these are also known as drivers. Implementation Drivers include:

- Competency drivers – develop, improve, and sustain ability to implement innovations
- Organization drivers – create and sustain supportive implementation environments
- Leadership drivers – leadership strategies that effectively support and manage change

As described in the MDE Professional Learning Community Roadmap, implementation can be defined in four stages (slightly modified from the PLC Roadmap, with a link provided below).

## Exploration Stage

During exploration, readiness is assessed by an Implementation Team. The Implementation Team is accountable for helping create readiness, an important function when the goal is to reach an entire population.

→ The establishment of an **Implementation Team** is critical.

## Installation Stage

During installation, resources are acquire or repurpose to do the work ahead. Teams help us recognize the need for these resources, secure the resources to do the work ahead, and prepare staff for the new practices and policies.

## Initial Implementation

During the period when the innovation is being used for the first time, practitioners and staff are attempting to use newly learned skills. Implementation Teams help to develop staff competencies required by the evidence-based practices (or policies), help administrators adjust organization roles and functions to align with the practices, and help leaders in the organization to fully support the process of using the practices and incorporating the necessary implementation supports.

## Full Implementation

The new practices and policies are now the standard of work where practitioners and staff routinely provide high quality services and the implementation supports are the way the district and schools carries out their work.

A similar framework for implementation is based on frameworks used in the child and family service sector (Hateley-Browne et al., 2019).

Implementation Stages	
<p><b>Stage 1: Engage and explore</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define what needs to change and for whom</li> <li>• Select and adopt program or practice</li> <li>• Set up an implementation team</li> <li>• Assess readiness; consider barriers and enablers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 2: Plan and prepare</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose implementation strategies</li> <li>• Develop an implementation plan</li> <li>• Decide how to monitor implementation quality</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 3: Initiate and refine</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start using the program or practice</li> <li>• Continuously monitor and improve</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 4: Sustain and scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain the program or practice, embedding as business-as-usual</li> <li>• Scale-up the program or practice</li> </ul>

## Resources for Practitioners

Hateley-Browne, J., Hodge, L., Polimeni, M., & Mildon, R. (2019).

*Implementation in action: A guide to implementing evidence-informed programs and practices.* Southbank VIC, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/guidelines/implementation-action>

MDE Continuous Improvement in Districts and Schools

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/cimp/>

MDE Professional Learning Community Roadmap (2017)

[https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=MDE071649&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE071649&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary)

MDE Regional Centers of Excellence

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/rc/>

State Implementation and Scaling up of Evidence Based Practices Center

<https://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/>

# Executive Summary

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This document is a compilation of individual reports prepared by U of M researchers, either individually or in teams, based on the themes, strategies, and direction of Reimagine Minnesota. We highly recommend a thorough review of this report in order to understand the evidentiary basis for and the details of the recommendations. The Executive Summary pulls out major recommendations into one combined list. We recognize that schools come to this work from different contexts, and that many have already taken some of the steps set forth below. These are offered in the spirit of moving state and local education systems toward achieving greater educational equity.

## I. Adult Behaviors

- Transformative change is possible only when school adults have invested in their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward building humanizing educational experiences for all children. Change strategies undertaken without this work risks defaulting to adult behaviors rooted in deficit beliefs about students.
- A toxic interaction with *any* adult at school negatively shapes a student's experience, so careful consideration of adult behaviors must include everyone who interacts with students: superintendents, building administrators, bus drivers, volunteers, and more.
- School adults can build their *knowledge* and *skills* related to children's lives in order to develop dispositions that center their humanity by:
  - **Knowledge**  
*Understand that systems and institutions shape the circumstances in which people find themselves.* A knowledge base that connects today's circumstances to all people's social, historical, and cultural contexts is essential to building skills that foster a sustaining disposition.
  - **Skills**  
*Grow one's ability to analyze where one is situated within systems and institutions in order to strategize.* Practice a constant attitude of curiosity about the human experience. Cultivate an ethos of vulnerability. *Use Asset pedagogies.* Educators have developed various approaches to honoring community funds of knowledge at school, collectively understood as asset pedagogies for their refusal to engage with assumptions that there is something absent that needs to be corrected about indigenous students and students of color.

## II. Cultural Competency and Inclusivity

*Part One: Toward a Culturally Competent Educator Force: Shifting Hearts to Serve Our Children*

- Without culturally competent administrators and policy makers, teachers may not feel they are supported to engage in culturally competent practices
- There are three core steps:
  - Students need to be humanized by (1) teaching educators about the history of our educational system and (2) providing opportunities for educators to engage with the experiences of marginalized students.
  - Educators must consider their own roles as racialized beings through self-reflection. In order to develop critical self-reflective skills, educators need time to (1) reflect on their own positionality as well as (2) engage in spaces where critical moments arise and are actively and deliberately unpacked.
  - Educators must engage in empathy towards students.

- To assess cultural competence, educators should decide the objective they need to examine critically concerning their practice, and then build tools to do just that, such as frameworks to critically examine curriculum and artifact analysis to demonstrate critical self-reflection or evidence of students sustaining culture.

#### *Part Two: Reflections on Culturally Responsive School Leadership*

- Perform a district-wide *Equity Audit*.
- Foster a district-wide equity vision and plan.
- Provide culturally responsive school leadership professional development.
- Align leadership behaviors such as teacher observations, mentoring, modeling, HR choices, curriculum choice/development, assessment practices, data analysis, student identification processes, professional development, and communication with and in support of the equity vision.
- Provide all teachers with regular culturally responsive professional development.
- Examine existing district resources and shift to support equity. When district/school goals and strategies are written, equity and cultural responsiveness should be weaved throughout and added to each priority.

### **III. Student Voice**

#### *Part One: Elevate Student Voice and Leadership and Improve/Ensure Inclusiveness in the School Culture and Environment*

- Structure time for all students to reset, release, and recalibrate throughout the day.
- Create student-centered spaces that are facilitated by adults in which students can problem solve together about conflicts and issues in their lives. Organize structures of self-criticism that includes students.
- Develop curricula and structure classrooms that address the lived experiences of students.
- Develop robust student government along with faculty advocates.
- Include a data scientist and interns in each school.
- Use student-to-staff ratios recommended by national associations to make staffing decisions about school psychologists, counselors and social workers.
- Create a professional greenhouse for teachers at work.

#### *Part Two: Learning, Cognition, & Student Voice*

- Teachers will need professional development opportunities and ongoing guidance in order to create culturally responsive spaces and learning experiences for their students. Teachers must understand how privilege, political, and social power play a systemic role in how education is structured. Teachers should have opportunities to reflect on their own assumptions about students, parents, and communities in order to recognize the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy.
- All students learn new information best when they are afforded opportunities to make connections between the new knowledge, their prior knowledge, and their lived experiences. Student cultural integrity must be upheld in order to promote academic success. Recognizing how learning happens is crucial.
- Teachers should be allowed the space to create lessons and units that are tied to students' communities so that the academic knowledge they are teaching becomes more meaningful to them and their families.

### **IV. Personalized Education**

- Personalized learning within an MTSS framework has the potential to address educational inequities when implemented effectively and with fidelity.
- Advocate for personalized learning in standards and curricula.
- Design, fund, and implement ongoing professional learning for teachers.
- Design, fund, and implement co-teaching and co-planning time.
- Implement flexible classroom/school/district schedules.
- Fund and leverage technology.



- Develop an equity lens to personalize learning.
- State and district leaders should consider offering a suite of resources so that educators and building leaders can exercise autonomy in making sound, local decisions in the best interests of their students.

## V. Community Bridges

- Meet community where they are at. Do not simply bring community into the school. Flip it - decenter school and go into and be actively engaged in community spaces.
- Foster, nurture, create and engage in conversations and decisions across communities.
  - Focus on sharing and presenting rather than information dumping.
  - Design family involvement days and opportunities that are NOT connected to gender, race, and/or ethnicity.
- Create multiple ways to support parent involvement in students' academic experiences.
  - Assume that parents have created a supportive home environment for their children that supports academics in the ways that work best in their lives.
  - Create opportunities for parents to learn about the instructional goals of the classroom, and opportunities for them to share how they support their children's learning at home.
  - Consider ways that students' education experiences can intersect with their everyday, lived experiences.
  - Engage in meaningful discourse with parents/families in formal (e.g., parent teacher conference, school events) and informal (e.g., brief conversations before and after the school day) contexts.
  - Consider technology as a bridge rather than a barrier.
  - Create and support networks that connect parents/families into school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.
  - Collaborate with independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.
- Use a universal design for learning (UDL) framework fused with culturally sustaining pedagogy to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities.
- Invite, involve, and authentically engage youth in building community bridges. For example, train young people to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them.
- Invest in afterschool programs, activities, and transportation as vital to maintaining community bridges. Create multiple pathways and formats for communication and connected learning, including communicating in all languages present in communities.
- Provide ongoing professional learning and ongoing support related to connected learning (connected teaching) becoming part of practice in schools.

## VI. Recruitment and Retention

- Minnesota must increase organization and sustainability by creating a **state-level legislative advocacy group** that partners with school districts and higher education to seek, maintain, and communicate widely about adequate funding sources for recruitment and retention efforts. These roles should be significant state-level leadership positions, with experiences and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and people of color at the center.
- **Partnerships** must be organized and intentional, sharing funding and resources. Efforts like Reimagine MN provide invaluable modeling of the importance of **reducing competition** for the sake of our state's children. Higher education funding models make competition both a reality and a barrier for genuine transformation of the teacher workforce.
- Partnership must also include **significant investment in induction**, which can and should be a joint effort between school districts and higher education institutions. An investment in induction includes financial support for personnel and ongoing research. Without deep and ongoing induction, the shaping powers of

teacher preparation are weak. When teacher education faculty are able to maintain mentoring relationships with new teachers, the benefits are mutual and widespread. Although induction supports provide benefits for the entire school, they can be critical for teachers of color who are navigating microaggressions, overt racism, and other challenges of working in predominantly White spaces. Induction is thus a key aspect of retention. It enhances efforts toward deepening partnerships and sharing resources to reduce competition toward the shared goal of a strong, diverse teaching force.

## **VII. School Finance**

- Results neutrality should serve as an additional criterion by which stakeholders can assess the equity of the school finance system, meaning that we are unable to predict how well a child performs based on his/her race, poverty status, or zip code.
- Minnesota has provisions to address additional costs for districts with high student need, but these efforts are muted in metropolitan schools because of relatively high labor costs.
- As part of reimagining Minnesota's school finance system, education leaders will have to reflect on what values are intrinsic to providing equitable opportunities to students, including frank consideration of integration and if the distribution of race is in itself a measure of educational opportunities.

## **VIII. A Role for Social & Emotional Learning (and Implications for Student Resilience)**

- Social and emotional learning is important for whole-student development. Academic and cognitive development co-occur with social, cultural, and identity development. They are intertwined and none of these components can be neglected if we want to improve student outcomes.
- SEL assessments provide indicators of the health of the system, the district, the school building, and the classroom – the extent to which educators and adults provide opportunities for students to develop and exercise successful positive SEL competencies.
- Effective SEL stems from two major approaches:
  - i. Direct instruction of social and emotional skills.
  - ii. Creating a safe, supportive, welcoming environment that encourages the use of appropriate social and emotional skills.
- Best SEL practices should follow guiding principles:
  - Set intentional and explicit expectations and learning opportunities.
  - Embed SEL activities into everyday teaching and learning.
  - Coordinate with school- and district-wide investment and adoption of SEL priorities.
- Integrate a variety of approaches and formats tailored to students' needs.
  - Pedagogical approaches should provide purposeful opportunities for perspective-taking (social awareness), cooperative learning, recognizing and regulating emotions, and self-reflection (self awareness).
  - These efforts are most effective when they capitalize on existing relationships and student bonds to promote SEL skills and further strengthening these relationships.
- Provide SEL training for all school personnel via deliberate professional development efforts. Encourage all stakeholders to build overarching and connected goals to create a unified school- or district-wide mission.
- SEL has important implications for improving student resilience by providing students with the skills and resources to be better equipped to navigate stress and daily challenges, as well give students the tools to construct environments and relationships that further reinforce these competencies.

# Adult Behaviors

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## Overview

The 2018 Reimagine Minnesota report outlines a goal to “eliminate adult behaviors and policies that lead to disproportionality; provide growth-oriented student, staff and family support.” Administrators are encouraged to engage the following strategies to work toward these changes in adult behaviors:

- Increase and strengthen support and mentorship for under-served students within and out of school;
- increase student support services and staffing including emotional/physical health, language, cultural liaisons, etc.;
- review discipline and other school policies for equity;
- review and revise student behavior and other policies with a race and cultural-conscious lens.

The four strategies above can be important steps toward diminishing disproportionality in discipline according to a student’s race and/or disability status. First, though, these strategies require significant initial and ongoing investment by the adults who will engage with them. This report takes a broader look at adult behaviors by beginning with the roots of the matter, viewing transformative change as possible only when school adults have invested in their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward building humanizing educational experiences for all children. Any of these strategies undertaken without this initial work would pose considerable risk of defaulting to adult behaviors and policies rooted in deficit beliefs about students.

## Background

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights has responded to ongoing concerns about disproportionality in discipline in Minnesota schools when viewed according to race and disability status. As they report (link provided in Resources section):

Throughout public schools in Minnesota, the data for the 2015-16 school year showed:

- American Indian students were ten times more likely to be suspended or expelled than White peers.
- African American students were eight times more likely to be suspended or expelled than White peers.
- Students of color were twice as likely to be suspended or expelled than White peers.
- Students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers without a disability.

These discipline patterns demonstrate the gravity of history’s ongoing influence in contemporary public schools. In the context of histories of dispossession through settler colonization and enslavement, for example, these data show the ongoing criminalization of American Indian and African American students. An education system that was built without Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and students with disabilities in mind must grapple with the dependencies among those histories and our institutions.

MDE explains that out-of-school suspensions do not address the problems that contribute to students’ so-called misbehavior, and in fact can exacerbate them (see the link in the Resource section). Most importantly, Minnesota’s data map on to society-wide concerns about the **school-prison nexus** discussed extensively by researchers such as Michelle Alexander (2010), Subini Annamma (2017), and Bettina Love (2019). Those most likely to be tied up in this nexus are those specifically named in the Minnesota Department of Human Rights data above: Black, Indigenous, people of color, and people with disabilities. The Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review describes the school-prison nexus (they use the more popular but unidirectional term “school-to-prison pipeline”) as follows:

Defined as the process by which excessively punitive disciplinary factors push students out of school and directly or indirectly into contact with the criminal justice system, the school-to-prison pipeline might be one of the most pressing civil rights challenges of our time. The “tough-on-crime” era that came to define the 1980s ushered in new changes to school discipline. Schools across the country began to adopt zero-tolerance policies, which apply “explicit, predetermined punishments to specific violations of school rules, regardless of the situation or context of the behavior.” (Slaughter-Johnson, 2019)

As adults working in schools, we must understand the roles we currently play in maintaining the school-prison nexus so that we can claim our roles in ending it.

## Understanding In-School Roles

Education researchers such as Linda Darling-Hammond and colleagues have popularized the notion that teachers are the most significant in-school factor contributing to student achievement. As discussed above, Minnesota’s often-celebrated public schools drastically underserve students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). This underserving occurs along every dimension and both in and out of schools, from structures (e.g., housing segregation, school funding) to institutional policies (e.g., zero tolerance, no excuses) to individual practices (e.g., how we talk to one another, body language). This complexity underscores the depth and breadth of the problem. Nevertheless, as we work toward shifting structures and policies, we must simultaneously grapple with the fact that the ways adults respond to children and youth at school (adult behaviors) contribute to these persistent inequities. Placing these assertions in the context of Reimagine MN and its concerns about the educational experiences of BIPOC students in Minnesota, educators should draw the conclusion that when we address our own behaviors, teachers and other adults in school can play key roles in improving the educational experiences of BIPOC students.

Adult interactions with students in schools are always racialized interactions. (See [Cultural Competence and Inclusivity](#).) This report focuses on how adults of all races interact with BIPOC students and with White students in ways that contribute to persistent inequities. Importantly, the section on [Recruitment and Retention](#) addresses strategies for increasing the number of BIPOC educators. The work of strengthening adult and student interactions at school will shift, but not end, when goals for recruitment and retention of BIPOC educators are realized. This report assumes that the work of building affirming and sustaining knowledge, skills, and dispositions is important for every adult who works in schools.

## Deconstructing Best Practices

The popular school of thought led by Darling-Hammond emphasizes that new teachers must be taught and mentored to develop the *knowledge, skills, and dispositions* known to contribute to best practices in the field. However, when we understand schools to be locations of social reproduction that continue to be plagued by the myriad consequences of systemic injustices, then we must also call into question the notion of best practices itself.

Understanding this, here we emphasize that how children and youth experience school is largely shaped by the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that adults carry with them. Again, although knowledge, skills, and dispositions are commonly understood as the pillars of mainstream teacher preparation, here we approach them with an explicit focus on how adults understand their students’ lives, in terms of histories, contexts, and lived experiences.

Thus, instead of viewing knowledge and skills as fixed and connected to universal truths about interacting with young people, we describe these fundamental aspects of teaching as being *constantly developed in their local contexts*. When knowledge and skills are understood as continuously built and practiced, adults are better positioned to build affirming and sustaining dispositions about the children in their care. Those behaviors have the potential to affirm a young person’s belonging and sense of agency at school. Consider the finding that a mere 10 second clip of a teacher’s voice or face is enough for viewers young and old to tell whether the teacher likes and admires a child (Willis



& Todorov, 2006). Dispositions are thus the linchpin of adult behaviors because this is how children and youth experience us—less in our words than in our nonverbal behavior and overall demeanor in their presence.

Given these expansions of how adult behaviors are rooted in our knowledge, skills, and dispositions, we must also recognize that children and youth come into contact with adults at school who fall into various types of roles. A toxic interaction with *any* adult at school negatively shapes a student's experience, so careful consideration of adult behaviors must include everyone who interacts with students: superintendents, building administrators, bus drivers, volunteers, and more.

## **Affirming and Sustaining Dispositions**

This section includes brief introductions to how school adults can build their *knowledge* and *skills* related to children's lives in order to develop *dispositions* that center their humanity. An affirming and sustaining disposition is one that understands students as complete, deserving, and brilliant (Delpit, 2012) as they are, and thus understands that it is adults' responsibility to devise school environments that support students. Each section includes notes on *how* school adults can build on their knowledge and skills to develop dispositions that affirm and sustain students who are historically and persistently marginalized at school and in society. The sections are all interrelated and must be understood as always in interaction with one another.

Theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1982) offers tools that help educators understand the difference between trying on a popular perspective and fully incorporating new thinking into our beliefs and understandings about the world. This distinction is clear when, for example, a public official apologizes to their constituents to save face after an embarrassing scandal. Although the apology may offer a salve for the public, generally we recognize that the words may sound right, that they do not ring true. The person is performing something they do not fully believe or embody in their behavior. Likewise, in schools, children and youth know very well the difference between an adult who is performing what they believe they are supposed to do or say and an adult who truly believes in them. When adults carry a deep belief that all children are *complete, deserving, and brilliant*, as Delpit (2012) describes, that belief emanates from all that we say and do. Affirming and sustaining dispositions are the byproducts of this belief.

## **Knowledge**

*Understand that systems and institutions shape the circumstances in which people find themselves.*

What we know and understand about our contexts guides how we act. A knowledge base that connects today's circumstances to their social, historical, and cultural contexts is essential to building skills that foster a sustaining disposition.

- Foundational narratives about U.S. history.
  - All communities have deep connections to settler colonization, enslavement, and imperialism. These histories live on in our institutions, policies, practices, and in our own bodies (Menakem, 2017; Waziyatawin, 2008).
  - These foundational narratives are the roots of what is often described in schools as trauma. Understand how traumas can be systemic (e.g., racism) as well as individual (e.g., surviving a car crash), and that school can be a site of additional trauma for those difficulties rooted in systems (Gaffney, 2019).
- Contemporary contexts.
  - Seek out the stories of oppression, resistance, triumph, and joy that have roots and branches in your community.

## **Skills**

*Grow one's ability to analyze where one is situated within systems and institutions in order to strategize.*

- The skill of turning inward.
  - Educator preparation tends to emphasize gazing outward. However, adult behavior, again, is a

manifestation of what we know and understand about the world. To recognize areas for growth and greater depth, school adults must learn to analyze themselves first. Examples of texts and films in the resource list is a good place to start.

- Practice a constant attitude of curiosity about the human experience.
- Cultivate an ethos of vulnerability. Specifically, seek guidance when you do not understand what a child is trying to communicate to you.
- Analyze your *media diet*. Ensure that you are listening to, reading, and following people who represent and embody the perspectives you seek.
- Part of an inward turn involves knowing when it is time to seek help. When you and colleagues feel you cannot connect with a child or youth, keep learning about them. Find people who understand what makes them tick.
- Asset pedagogies.
  - Since the 1990s, educators have developed various approaches to honoring community *funds of knowledge* (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) at school, collectively understood as *asset pedagogies* for their refusal to engage with assumptions that there is something absent that needs to be corrected about BIPOC students (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2006a, 2006b; Paris, 2012). To the contrary, asset pedagogies acknowledge the histories discussed above, recognizing that U.S. society is built on a foundation of injustice. Engage in careful study about the asset pedagogies—beyond the versions that can be explored through a course or short professional development workshop—to determine what will work for you and your community. Asset pedagogies can transform schools when adults engage in the serious work of transforming themselves first (Mason, 2017).
  - Develop a deficit radar. Toolkits abound, and many of them are rooted in deficit mindsets. Create a set of questions to ask yourself when you come across a new approach, *especially* if it seems like a silver bullet.

## Dispositions

Behaviors are manifestations of our beliefs and understandings about the world. The [Student Voice](#) section of this report offers guidance for educators to consider how respecting what children and youth know and understand about the world also gives them space to express their knowledge and understanding more fully through their academic experiences. When adult dispositions are transformed, *then* school and district efforts to build infrastructure (e.g., increasing student support services and staffing) and policies will have fertile soil in which to grow.

The [References](#) (at the end of the report) and additional resources section below offer a collection of suggestions for how school adults can further commit themselves to building the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will transform their interactions with young people.

## Resources

### Minnesota Resources

MN Department of Human Rights

Education Discrimination: Suspension and Expulsion

<https://mn.gov/mdhr/news-community/partnerships/suspension-and-expulsion/>

MN Department of Education

Alternatives to Suspension

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/alt/004674>

## **Funds of Knowledge**

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/equity-education/migrant-education-program/migrant-and-bilingual-5/funds-knowledge>

## **Magazines**

*Rethinking Schools*

<https://www.rethinkingschools.org>

Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine>

## **Films**

DuVernay, A. (2016). *13th*. Available from [www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com)

A documentary exploring race, justice, and mass incarceration in the U.S., reflecting on the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

# Cultural Competence

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## *Part One: Toward a Culturally Competent Educator Force: Shifting Hearts to Serve Our Children*

### **Overview**

According to the Reimagine Minnesota Final Report (2018), it is necessary to develop, sustain and evaluate teacher cultural competence. Recommendations for doing so include:

- build equity education into professional development, licensure and teacher prep degree programs;
- analyze and develop education standards and student evaluation using an equity lens;
- provide time, professional development and wellness resources to support and sustain teachers' work;
- build expertise and competence through teacher collaboration; and
- train for culturally competent teaching approaches and school-wide practices.

We expand upon these recommendations in this section in order to understand what educators will need to engage in culturally competent ways. We first conceptualize and define cultural competence. We want to emphasize that cultural competence is not solely to be engaged by teachers. Without culturally competent administrators and policy makers, teachers may not feel they are supported to engage in culturally competent practices (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). Therefore, this report should inform the needed mindset for educators broadly. We provide resources for teachers, administrators, and policy makers so they can engage in this life-long journey of critical reflection to be culturally competent.

### **Background**

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) has the potential to achieve three key outcomes for students: academic achievement, cultural competency, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2008). Ladson-Billings described cultural competence as what African-American students compromise in order to achieve academic success in White-normed schools. Therefore, Ladson-Billings raised the notion that it is the responsibility of teachers to engage in pedagogies that maintain the culture of African-American children in the midst of their schooling experiences. Said another way, Ladson-Billings challenges educators to employ instructional practices strategically designed to promote the culture of our commonly marginalized students. (See [Student Voice](#).)

For the purpose of this report, we examine how cultural competence has been defined in education and what is needed to achieve cultural competence. Lastly, we examine the key areas that need to be developed with some practical understandings as to what this might look like so that we may Reimagine education in Minnesota.

### **Cultural Competence (Re)Defined**

Cultural competence is defined for educational spaces as practices that support students to “honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture, where [students] are likely to have a chance of improving their socioeconomic status and making informed decisions about the lives they wish to lead” (Ladson-Billings, 2008, p. 36). In 2008, Ladson-Billings problematized how cultural competence is often defined in the medical field and beyond education. In medicine, the purpose of cultural competence was to provide individuals of the dominant culture a skillset to interpret the “cultural messages of their clients” (Ladson-Billings, 2008, p. 35), and



employing practices that are viewed as culturally sensitive in nature. However, these practices are more often than not essentializing in nature, engage stereotypes and neglect to center a patient's individualized lived experience.

According to healthcare scholars, cultural competence within the healthcare profession is, “understanding the importance of social and cultural influences on patients’ health beliefs and behaviors; considering how these factors interact at multiple levels of the health care delivery system (e.g., at the level of structural processes of care or clinical decision-making)... devising interventions that take these issues into account to assure quality health care delivery to diverse patient populations” (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Ananeh-Firempong, 2003, p. 297). This definition speaks to how cultural competence has had differing meanings than what was proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995). Rather than teachers being provided a skillset to engage with students of various cultures, educators should serve in ways that maintain the culture of students. What Ladson-Billings describes will require a shift in the perspective or lens of many educators currently in the field and those just entering (hooks, 2010).

### **Toward Critical Reflection**

hooks (2010) adds a layer to this conversation by considering that our own lens, our perspective (understandings we are socialized to knowing), frames how we interact with others in the world. That White people have been conditioned to be racist—therefore being suspicious of people of color, particularly when people of color do not fulfill the stereotypes they are socialized to believe, impacts how people of color are treated. This particularly maps onto schooling. All people are biased given how we are socialized; however, White people have power systemically and therefore can be racist. Given these understandings, Gay and Kirkland (2003) build on the work of Ladson-Billings and others when stating teachers must understand themselves as people, their school context, and must question their own understandings and beliefs to be an effective teacher. A level of cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection must be developed to support the needs of all students. (See [Adult Behaviors](#).)

According to Kirkland and Gay (2003):

Self-reflection and cultural critical consciousness are imperative to improving the educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color. They involve thoroughly analyzing and carefully monitoring both personal beliefs and instructional behaviors about the value of cultural diversity, and the best ways to teach ethnically different students for maximum positive effects. Corresponding behaviors have to be changed to incorporate more positive knowledge and perceptions of cultural diversity. To engage in these continuous critiques and efforts to make teaching more relevant to diverse students, teachers need to have a thorough understanding of their own cultures and the cultures of different ethnic groups, as well as how this affects teaching and learning behaviors. (p. 182)

Many educators have had few, if any, interactions with people of color (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Therefore, the majority of teachers are not in a position to be culturally critically conscious or be self-reflective in ways that enhance their capacity to be culturally competent. In light of these current limitations of the majority of our teachers in the field, these areas must be developed. This point is not to say teachers and educators have not taken course work or completed professional developments on topics that take up race and culture. Rather, courses on race and culture are regularly perceived as classes about other people, especially given White people often do not view themselves as racialized beings. Put another way, if one does not understand their own culture and who they are as a racialized being, how can they engage about the culture and race of other racialized people? (See [Adult Behaviors](#).) White pre-service teachers commonly refer to culture as something other people have (people of color), whereas preservice teachers of color do not. This is a result of how cultures are often celebrated rather than embraced in our schools. We have much work to do in this specific area so that teachers understand who they are, given their own positionality, while being

self-reflective so they can then consider how to best meet the needs of their students and communities of color. This work is life-long, but there are specific areas that should be developed to achieve cultural competence.

### **Who Needs to Engage in Culturally Competent Practices?**

Thus far, this discussion and the recommendations center the needs of teachers. However, there is a need for administrators and others in support roles to develop cultural critical consciousness and skills towards self-reflection. Marshall and Khalifa (2018) found instructional coaches who were trained to support teachers in developing culturally relevant practices did not feel they had the support of senior administration in the schools in which they served. For a little background, this district hired instructional coaches under the Quality Compensation Law. The goal was to center the cultural backgrounds and needs of students in classrooms across the district. Instructional coaches found that although they were trained to do said work, the teachers were not ready, and it was essentially not a priority of the teachers.

One challenge expressed by those in the study was the principals and central office administrators said that culturally relevant instruction was a priority; however, they felt it was mostly in theory. According to the Director in the Office of Educational Equity in the district, “I believe our Assistant Superintendent would be better if he didn’t have that arm [the superintendent] leaning on him. There’s this fear of doing the right thing... they do not hold anybody accountable in this district but people of color.” Therefore, although there were policies and people in place to support culturally relevant work, this work was not viewed as a priority, specifically because central office administrators, including the superintendent, did not visibly demonstrate it was in fact a priority.

Based on the presented definitions and scholarly underpinnings, there are some key understandings that will need to be enhanced among our educators in Minnesota to support the cultural competence of students. First, students need to be humanized. Next, educators must consider their own positionality as racialized beings through self-reflection. Finally, educators must engage in empathy towards students (Warren, 2014). (See [Adult Behaviors](#).)

### **Humanizing Students**

When students have schooling challenges, it is often true that their communities, homes, parents, and even the students are blamed (Toshalis, 2015). This blame is based on the ways by which individuals are socialized, believing White-normed ways of knowing as right. In reality, educators should be in a position to embrace and support the cultural identities of their students. The U.S. has a complex history not often discussed in the K-20 context. Therefore, the majority of practicing educators have been socialized to have racist and biased beliefs about students, specifically concerning those of color (Toshalis, 2015). Many educators enter the field so they might one day return to schools like those they attended in their childhood, that are majority White and often not in urban centers. The reality is, most beginning teachers enter their careers in schools that serve majority Black and brown children. Meaning, educators enter spaces in which they have limited experiences with the populations they serve. Therefore, there is a need to first humanize students. Steps toward humanizing students include (a) teaching educators about the history of our educational system, and (b) providing opportunities for educators to engage with the experiences of marginalized students. (See [Student Voice](#).)

### **Learn the History of the Educational System**

Americans more often than not have been exposed to a racist history where Whites are presented as saviors of people of color. For example, the history of the U.S. often begins with Columbus discovering America. However, America was not in need of discovery. Indigenous populations inhabited America, but were not viewed as equivalent to Whites, described as barbaric, and were murdered, enslaved, and demoralized. In fact, schooling was a weapon to socialize Indigenous children as the languages, cultures, and beliefs of those children were not valued. The history of education has repeated itself for Black, Latino, and other populations. However, the narrative of how the U.S. introduced public schools often is not discussed. Freed people developed schools across the South, initiating the need for free public schooling (Anderson, 1988).

These counter narratives initiate the beginning of unlearning that must first happen to humanize students—because we must first humanize people. We are often presented with narratives of Whites saving people of color, rather than the histories that center the counter narratives written by people of color. This conversation then leads to the fact that people of color do not need saving. By reading and critically examining articles by scholars such as James Anderson, and Massey and Denton (1993), we begin to understand the complexity of the purposes of education and how people are systemically marginalized. There are many purposes of education and the educational system we have today is not based on the purposes of education necessarily valued by our marginalized communities. Through this historical lens, we also begin to understand that spatial segregation is the byproduct of racist and strategic policies that mirror policies that continue to segregate students between and within schools. These historical understandings then begin a conversation of what we have not been taught and why. We also begin to ask: *what do we not know?* Also, *how do we move forward?* After examining historical counter narratives, we can then begin to critically self-reflect.

### **Understanding Our Stories**

Educators often do not understand the cultures and communities of the students with whom they are engaging. Understanding the community means learning and being a member of the community in which one teaches. Engaging with the community also would mean that the voices of individuals of color within the school community are no longer silenced (Delpit, 1988). From cultural liaisons to parents, it is vital that we engage those who know our communities best when considering district and school policies (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018) and classroom practices. (See [Student Voice](#) and [Community Bridges](#).)

To better understand the positionality of the student experience, there is much work by scholars examining the diversity and oppressive practices of schooling (DePouw, 2012, Chambers, Huggins, Locke, & Fowler, 2014; Cerecer, 2013). Examining specific cases with guidance can support teachers to unlearn their perspectives of what schooling is—there is no *normal* or *abnormal* schooling experience. Each student has their own experience, which they can play a direct role in enhancing.

### **Critical Self-Reflection**

There are several obstacles to engaging in self-reflection, according to Gay and Kirkland (2003). These obstacles include describing problems and ideas rather than engaging in a process of introspection and reconstructing understandings. In fact, self-reflection is often not done in parallel with considering one's culture and race. Gay and Kirkland (2003) recommend future teachers engage in critical self-reflection so that their personal orientations shift as the educator's awareness evolves. In order to develop critical self-reflective skills, educators need time to (a) reflect on their own positionality as well as (b) engage in spaces where critical moments arise and are actively and deliberately unpacked. These areas are discussed further.

### **Understanding One's Positionality**

Examining one's own positionality would require educators to investigate their own cultural background and racial identity. Being that 94% of teachers in Minnesota are White, understanding one's cultural background would involve examining Whiteness through a critical lens. Critical Whiteness Studies is a field that examines the ways White supremacy and privilege are socially perpetuated. The majority of White people have not considered themselves to be racialized beings and have not considered their own cultural identity. Therefore, educators need space and time to consider what being White means and what beliefs they are socialized to hold so that they can critically consider the beliefs they may have of others (Delpit, 1988). (See [Adult Behaviors](#).) Without these understandings, biases and racist beliefs will continue to plague one's lens, worldview, and therefore practice, ultimately limiting an educator's potential to be culturally competent (hooks, 1994, 2010).

### **Engaging in Critical Moments**

Educators need to engage in conversations on race; however, such conversations are often avoided. DiAngelo (2018) notes that conversations on race are avoided given the status quo to maintain comfort for Whites. White fragility is defined as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (p. 57). We can no longer avoid engaging on race to protect the feelings of White people. The lives of students of color are literally on the line. In order to move forward as a field, we must be willing to name racist and biased (conscious and unconscious) acts and microaggressions, which are enacted on marginalized persons everyday causing physical harm to those who are continually oppressed (Sue et al., 2007). There are various categories of microaggressions ([Figure 1](#)). By understanding our own positionality, we engage in conversations that center oppression in the present, rather than framing oppression as a historical artifact.



Figure 1. Categories of and associations among racial microaggressions (from Sue et al., 2007).



During conversations, it is important that the facilitator has the capacity to both recognize and engage educators in reflecting on racist and biased speech. This can be done with specific conversational coaching moves or other strategies. These moments are vital for personal development and self-reflection. If these moments are not engaged in the moment, individuals can deny them, or describe their understandings of a moment, creating a false reality and not examining their own, often, unconscious biases. This type of interaction requires skill and much emotional labor of those facilitating. The emotional labor of those engaging in such work must be acknowledged and supported.

## The Application of Empathy

As we engage in conversations on race and culture, often feelings of guilt arise (Gay & Kirkland, 2003), but we must move past these emotions. Toshalis (2015) raises that it is up to teachers to understand their students so the teacher can then modify their own behaviors to meet the needs of students. Warren (2014) describes the application of empathy as, “a professional disposition teachers engage to adopt students’ social and cultural perspectives for the purposes of better connecting learning experiences to students’ home culture and the various forms of their individual cultural expression” (p. 400). Warren (2014) describes a framework to develop the capacity to empathize with students (Figure 2).

### Phase 1: Perspective Taking (PT) and the demonstration of Empathic Concern (EC)

- PT- activities, strategies, policies, etc., to consider the first person, student-level understandings of the student.
- EC- demonstrates a sharing of emotions, or feelings with the student.

### Phase 2: Application of new knowledge of students

- This application should be based on information gained from PT.

### Phase 3: Student Feedback

- This feedback can be social and/or intellectual.
- One considers how the student responds to teacher interaction.

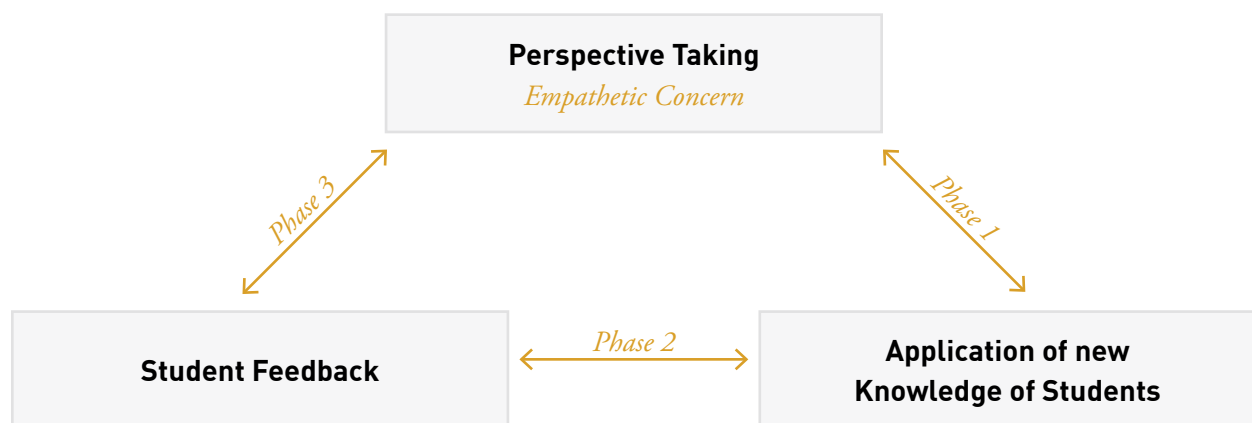


Figure 2. A framework to develop the capacity to empathize with students (from Warren, 2014).

## How Do We Know If We Have Changed? Assessing Cultural Competence

Assessing cultural competence is complex because it requires intentionality. Assessments developed individually and/or collectively in light of the aforementioned understandings are key. Otherwise, we resort to assessing superficial, task-oriented pieces of knowledge that fail to map onto one's pedagogy. Such assessments could include, but are not limited to:

- Frameworks used to critically examine curriculum for social-justice orientations, and
- Artifact analysis to demonstrate one's engagement in critical self-reflection and evidence from students of sustaining culture.

Rather than prescribed assessments, educators should identify the objectives they need to examine critically concerning their practice, and then build tools to do just that.

Ultimately, we will know there has been a change in cultural competence when the way we think, and therefore speak and write, about children and people changes. Assigning readings, completing workshops, and changing policies do not necessarily change practice (Delpit, 1988). What we mean by this is that superficial changes concerning cultural competence will not change the behaviors that result in racist and biased schooling experiences. In reality, we have heart work to do so that practices change because people are better for children as a result of the work they must first do on themselves. Educators who are truly culturally competent are willing to give up something (e.g. power, money, positions) or be criticized for countering injustices. Ultimately, we need teachers and educators who Love (2019) describe as abolitionist teachers. According to Love (2019),

Abolitionist teaching is not a teaching approach: It is a way of life, a way of seeing the world, and a way of taking action against injustice. It seeks to resist, agitate, and tear down the educational survival complex through teachers who work in solidarity with their schools' community to achieve incremental changes in their classrooms and schools for students in the present day, while simultaneously freedom dreaming and vigorously creating a vision for what schools will be when the educational survival complex is destroyed. (p. 89)

Our children need abolitionist teachers, principals, administrators, and policymakers. By participating in critical reflection, understanding systemic hierarchies of oppression, as well as considering one's own positionality within the education system, we begin this work. We will know we are on track for change when our talk about children changes. When our policies and practices reflect the cultural needs of our students, and when our communities feel welcome in schooling spaces. Children will no longer be *other people's children*, but rather our children (Delpit, 2006). We will see pedagogies of liberation employed. This work is challenging and counters White fragility. In order to create an education force in Minnesota that is culturally competent, educators must first be prepared to do this transformational work.

## Resources for Practitioners

### Regarding Race:

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006).

*Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kendi, I. X. (2017).

*Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. New York, NY: Random House.

Milner, H. R. (2010).

*Start where you are, but don't stay there*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tatum, B. D. (2017).

*Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

### **Regarding Critical Whiteness:**

Podcast: <https://www.sceneonradio.org/>

Critical Whiteness Studies (Oxford Research Encyclopedia)

<https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-5>

Matias, C. E. (2016).

*Feeling White: Whiteness, emotionality, and education.* The Netherlands: Brill Sense.

### **Regarding History:**

Movie: <https://www.pbs.org/video/american-experience-taken-their-families/>

Anderson, J. D. (1988).

*The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993).

*American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sadovnik, A., Crookston, P., & Semel, S. (2006).

*Exploring education: An introduction to the foundations of education (3rd ed.).* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. (see Chapter 3: History of Education)

Watkins, W. H. (2001).

*The White architects of Black education: Ideology and power in America, 1865-1954.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

# Cultural Competence

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## *Part Two: Reflections on Culturally Responsive School Leadership*

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) is one of the least understood areas of school leadership. Ironically, it is also one of the least referenced, researched, discussed, and implemented. CRSL could be defined as “*leading the schools in ways that ‘the entire school environment [is] responsive to the needs of minoritized students’*” (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 1272). It often is assumed that an intensification of current school practices will improve educational outcomes for minoritized students. We erroneously assume that by simply talking about issues such as race, socio-economic status, or language groups, culturally responsive leadership practice will organically or magically emerge in schools. Equally puzzling, most of the scholarship on culturally responsive schooling has centered on teaching, pedagogy, or curriculum, and has ironically neglected leadership—perhaps the most crucial component for continuous and sustained culturally responsive schooling.

This is an oversight, given that leaders are often cited as significantly influential to student outcomes and considered to be the drivers of reform and the connection between policy and practice. District leaders are held accountable for the growth and efficacy of their building principals, and ultimately teachers; building leaders are best positioned to lead the teachers that are persistently exclusionary or initially resistant to cultural responsiveness; they are best poised to develop the willing teachers who need help in sustaining their culturally responsive practice; and they are uniquely positioned to impact non-classroom spaces, both within and outside of the school.

In *Culturally Responsive School Leadership*, Khalifa (2018) addresses the increasingly important topic of how school leaders must become culturally responsive by becoming situated in the communities they serve. Schools do not exist in isolation to their communities, and school leaders have a unique ability to bring the surrounding community into the schools that serve their students. This approach is different in that it emphasizes systemic change and shifts in practice and policy.

### **Core Areas of CRSL**

Cultural responsiveness is a necessary component of effective school leadership. The role of school boards, teachers, and parents and students are all crucial; but if cultural responsiveness is to be present and sustainable in school, it must foremost and consistently be the vision and operational mindset of district and school leaders. District leaders consistently educate school boards and community members of their vision and commitment to equity and culturally responsive education.

Essentially, CRSL is characterized by a core set of unique leadership behaviors. These include:

- being critically self-reflective—this entails the practice of leaders becoming aware of the historical barriers that students, families, and communities have faced, and then situating themselves in those histories;
- developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula; this requires leaders to move beyond conversations around race, and into core leadership practices of instructional leadership in both the development of teachers and curricula;
- promoting inclusive school contexts; this means identifying and dismantling the practices that have long allowed for the oppression or marginalization of minoritized students;
- deeply understanding, embracing, and celebrating student identity; and
- engaging, learning from, and incorporating students’ indigenous community contexts.

CRSL is especially needed in districts that are racially homogenous, and in many instances, those districts need CRSL training even more.

## **Why Equity is not Enough**

We emphasize it is not enough to seek equity. Rather, we must seek equity for the sake of the humanity of all of our students and their families. We are not only looking to have equitable achievement, discipline, and other school-related data points. Instead, we are looking for our students to be healed, whole, and affirmed within and out of school. We are looking for our students to bring their own unique identities into school, in much the same way White and high-SES students feel affirmed in school. And, district and school leaders recognize that communities have their own goals, visions, and uses for schooling. This understanding will only help school leaders better serve and improve practice.

## **Emphasizing Community and Self-Reflection**

CRSL emphasizes critical self-reflection. In doing so, district and school leaders are constantly looking for ways they are situated in and reproduce oppressive contexts that they inherited when they assumed their leadership positions. For example, if Black, immigrant, low-SES, and EL students are suspended more often than their classmates, school leaders cannot remain neutral about this, attributing it to an earlier administrator or broader society. In other words, remaining neutral is not an option when oppressive trends occur in schools.

Community perceptions can help us be critically self-reflective! Integrating the perceptions and understandings (epistemologies) of the people we serve is one of the ways that schools can advance their own critical self-reflection and that we can examine our own perceptions of our schools and of ourselves. Parents and other community members are well-aware of how schools are viewed in the communities, and the reasons why those perceptions are present. (See [Community Bridges](#).)

Whereas some of these deeper issues are taken up in the new book, here we present some of the leadership actions that leaders can begin to consider incorporating into their practice as they work to become culturally responsive school leaders.

### **1. Performing a District-wide Equity Audit**

Equity Audits are research-based analyses of why academic and discipline disproportionalities exist in a district, identifying what districts are currently doing well, and where they need the most improvement. There are several reasons that Equity Audits should be the very first thing that districts do when planning to engage equity work and improve cultural responsiveness. The emphasis is a systemic response to inequities and blocked opportunities for minoritized students, and these audits help leaders identify what to prioritize with equity work. This tool helps districts pinpoint and *visiblize* sources of inequity and inadvertent/reproductive oppression. Through survey data collection, districts elevate all stakeholder voices in the process of reform. They compare multiple, often unconnected, databases that reveal inequitable systems and approaches. And, after making sense of the equity data for school leaders and staff, the audits link these findings to sustainable and precise equity reforms.

### **2. Fostering a district-wide equity vision and plan**

District and school leaders must initiate the core of the vision and priorities, the plan of implementation, what will be emphasized from one year to the next, and the official equity goals and objectives. Teams of students, parents, teachers and other administrators will collaboratively develop specific strategies and even potentially co-lead in these crucial activities, but the principal must make the decision to lead the organization down this road.

### **3. Culturally Responsive School Leadership professional development**

District and school leaders need their own, research-driven, and uniquely designed professional development in cultural responsiveness. The CRSL academy has been transformative for districts because it is a professional



learning experience designed for and inclusive of all district and school leaders, from teacher-leaders to principals and superintendents. At crsli.org, professional development opportunities are provided, including personal reflection, tools, policy and practice—that allow leaders to go deep with anchor text and their own learning and leadership.

#### **4. Equity observation, and progress monitoring**

Equity work in schools is too often treated like a conversation. Indeed, some educators are hesitant to talk about race because they feel unsafe, unsure, or even guilty. Although school leaders have a role to play in promoting safe ways of discussing race, the core functions of leadership must also push for equity and cultural responsiveness. Leadership behaviors such as teacher observations, mentoring, modeling, HR choices, curriculum choice/development, assessment practices, data analysis, student identification processes, professional development, and communication must all be aligned in support of the equity vision.

#### **5. Teacher selection**

It is important to remember not to assume that just because teachers come from the same racial or ethnic background as the students, that equity and cultural responsiveness are automatically in place. It is also wrong to assume that White teachers cannot implement culturally responsive relationships, pedagogical, and curriculum behaviors. Indeed, shifting demographics of student and teacher populations all affirm the need to have regular culturally responsive professional development. In a recent culturally responsive PD that Dr. Khalifa facilitated, district leaders informed him that in the coming year 20% of the teaching staff would be newly-hired. His response was:

*“This is your chance! Let’s add the appropriate HR measures that will ensure that the district hires teachers that are committed to the equity vision!”*

#### **6. Solidifying/shifting district resources**

One of the most important leadership tasks that can support equity is how school and district resources are managed. We can argue almost all schools need more resources, but a significant amount of equity and cultural responsiveness can be established within the budgets that schools currently have. For example: PD resources can be shifted toward system-level equity consultants; specific title funding resources can be shifted to allow for teachers to partner with students and families to collect information that will be used to enhance culturally responsive curricula; when district/school goals and strategies are written, equity and cultural responsiveness should be weaved throughout and added to each priority. Individual school and district contexts will require deep examination of past practices as they have been tied to potentially inequitable strategies.

Becoming a Culturally Responsive School Leader is not easily accomplished via a checklist or workshop. It begins with serious critical self-reflection not only on the policies and practices that have caused inequities for students, but the assumptions and beliefs we hold as individual learners. Talking about race is important, but not sufficient. Moving from conversation to action is the defining first step in becoming a Culturally Responsive School Leader.

### **Resources for Practitioners**

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute

<http://crsli.org/>

Khalifa, M. (2018).

*Culturally responsive school leadership*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard Education Press.

# Student Voice

## *Part One: Elevate Student Voice and Leadership and Improve/Ensure Inclusiveness in the School Culture and Environment*

### Overview

This section of the report focuses on Strategy E: Elevate student voice and leadership and improve/ensure inclusiveness in the school culture and environment. Related directions discussed in the Reimagine Minnesota report included:

- Fostering and catalyzing inclusive and respectful school environments and school community practices;
- Building inclusiveness in the school culture and environment;
- Working to eliminate bias in the student community;
- Empowering student voice and leadership in school life and education issues;
- Promoting student engagement, leadership and connections between kids and kids; and
- Providing culturally inclusive social and physical school environments.

To address Strategy E and related directions, we begin this section with a call for reimagining how schools are organized, with suggestions for moving away from control and compliance toward inclusiveness and engagement, and with practical next steps focused on creating space, engaging student leadership and self-criticism, and increasing capacity.

### **Reimagine School Culture: From Standardization to Mattering, Flourishing, and Love**

The 19th and 20th centuries ushered in the industrial age defined by a culture of mass production and standardization. Today the production of goods on a massive scale fashioned to standard specifications is a cornerstone of society's underlying assumptions, decision-making, and how we imagine outcomes across virtually every sector, including the field of education. At the K-12 level (although interestingly far less so in higher education) pre-packaged curricula and standardized testing are staples driving the process and outcomes of teaching and learning.

An education system based on centuries-old milestones of mass production and standardization leaves little room for cultivating student voice. Moreover, the current information age and technological revolution that define the 21st century knowledge economy require a concomitant shift in the education of young people, including a reexamination of basic assumptions underlying the education system. At the heart of mass production and standardization is the process of assimilation—not the valuing of difference and not the cultivation of voice.

Rather than the pluralistic metaphor of the tossed salad in which all ingredients contribute by maintaining their distinct flavors, the 20th century education system works toward the 20th century metaphor of the U.S. as a melting pot in which all assimilate by melting/giving up their distinct identities to fit into mainstream, dominant American culture based in a White racial frame (WRF; Feagin, 2013). Renowned sociologist Joe Feagin defines the WRF as a grand social narrative in the U.S., based in White supremacy that functions to advance a pro-White/anti-other orientation. The WRF is composed of stereotypes and prejudice, racialized narratives, racial images and preferred language accents, racialized emotions, and a tendency to discriminate against people of color. "Naming and understanding the WRF sets the stage for more fully observing, analyzing, and addressing the effects of racism in a way that takes into account its historical, structural, and institutional antecedents" (Grier-Reed, Gagner, & Ajayi, 2018, p. 66).

Consider the field of education and the period of segregation, where separate was never equal and worked to

uphold systems of White supremacy that subjugated Black people into the position of second class citizenship. However, integration did not end racism or racial inequity in education. As a result of integration, Black teachers and educators were largely pushed out of the field of education when Black schools closed. Currently, Black educators are grossly underrepresented in today's classrooms. Moreover, for Black students, integration often meant being bussed to hostile White schools and either assimilating or being pathologized and pushed out. Evidence of pathologization exists across time (Heitzeg, 2015). Consider the case of *Larry P. v Riles*, data indicating that Black children are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with emotional behavioral disorders (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012), and suspension and expulsion rates up to 10 times higher for students who are not White in the state of Minnesota (see link to MN Department of Human Rights in the [Resource](#) section below). The education system has functioned to pathologize and push these students out of school.

In the melting pot metaphor, those most able to melt or assimilate into Whiteness are advantaged over those who are least able to assimilate. Hence, in order to achieve academic success in White-normed schools, African Americans are expected to compromise themselves in ways that move away from Blackness and toward Whiteness. In this racialized context of education, it is unsurprising then that some groups fare better and some fare worse resulting in racial inequities and disparities in outcomes.

The cultivation of student voice requires a recognition of the White racial frame (WRF) and a new set of organizing principles. Reckoning with this dominant cultural narrative takes into account the longstanding, established nature of systemic racism across institutions in U.S. society in ways that primarily focusing on implicit and explicit bias does not (Feagin, 2013). The latter tends to reify the narrow view that small groups and individuals (i.e., bigots) cause discrimination in this country.

To elevate student voice and improve inclusiveness, a critical examination of the ways in which the WRF is embedded in the composition, culture, discourse, and practices of schools, where Whiteness is the normative standard. This examination must be accompanied by an emphasis on mattering, flourishing, and love. Imagine how education might change the trajectory for disenfranchised students, when organized around mattering, flourishing, and love in which Whiteness was not the normative standard to which minoritized groups were held (in order to be considered worthy and intelligent). Consider the case of African American young people where opportunities to value their racial identities and resist assimilation into mainstream culture are associated with positive development and wellbeing (Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2015).

## **Mattering**

*"The difference is I have someone to listen to me" (Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010, p.143).*

An education system organized around mattering requires a fundamental shift in orientation from one in which students must assimilate to a WRF and melt into the institution to one in which institutional agents such as teachers and administrators value and adapt to the racial and cultural identities of students. Too often instead of engaging in self-critique including a critique of the school's WRF, faculty and administrators critique students, focusing on how students must change to fit the culture of the school (Tucker et al., 2010). Reflexively examining how the culture and composition of the school, its institutional practices, and institutional agents teach or fail to teach students that they matter is of utmost importance to student voice and takes precedence over teaching students to walk in a line or sit quietly. This includes a culture of self-critique that reckons with the influence of a WRF in working toward "a thoughtful and universal philosophy about how students and others in the school are to be treated all day, every day" (Tucker et al., 2010, p. 142). Such a shift in orientation can have real world consequences for students of color who are disproportionately disciplined and pushed out of school for subjective behaviors such as disrespect, disruption, and defiance (Caton, 2012; Gbolo & Grier-Reed, 2016; Hilberth & Slate, 2014).

Connected to a nurturing school climate, mattering facilitates wellbeing and academic success across diverse racial and ethnic groups, particularly for those who have been traditionally marginalized and excluded (Schlossberg, 1989;

Tucker et al., 2010). For African American students, simply having someone to talk to about being treated unfairly is linked to higher grade point averages (Powell & Jacob Arriola, 2003). Feeling valued and being heard matter.

“People matter simply because: others attend to them (awareness), invest themselves in them (importance), or look to them for resources (reliance)” (Elliot, Kao, & Grant, 2004, p.339). “Mattering is thought to be a powerful, fundamental, and pervasive human need based on strong biological and psychological processes. The importance of mattering to others can likely be placed only behind safety needs and basic physiological needs” (Tucker et al., 2010, p.135). Moreover, all schools are organized around mattering, but some people matter more than others. Moving towards a more inclusive school climate begins with an honest assessment of how schools are already organized around mattering, particularly with respect to racial bias.

## **Flourishing**

Meeting students where they are, mattering involves a holistic approach to education that seeks to engage the whole student and to help them flourish. Flourishing is connected to wellbeing. This includes the development of skills and aptitudes that move one toward more fully realizing their unique potential as a person and a citizen (Keyes, 2006). An inclusive school environment recognizes, honors, and promotes the many contexts that facilitate flourishing in the lives of young people inside and outside of school, including their communities and cultures.

Currently, the education system prioritizes academic achievement typically measured via standardized test scores as a chief objective over flourishing which is more aligned with the identification and development of human strengths and wellbeing. Yet, the concept of flourishing associated with mastery, purpose, quality relationships, positive self-regard, and subjective and psychological wellbeing is increasingly relevant (Datu, 2018; Ryff & Singer, 2003). There is a rise in mental health needs among young people (Prothero, 2018). For adolescent girls and boys, suicide is the second leading cause of death, and approximately 32% percent of adolescents have an anxiety disorder (Prothero, 2018). Moreover, 12% of youth aged 12 to 17 have experienced a major depressive episode in the previous year (Prothero, 2018). Keyes (2006) reports that nearly 1 in 10 children experience a major depressive episode before their 14th birthday, and this can be linked to a downward spiral. “Depressed youth are more likely to smoke cigarettes, to report substance use and abuse, to exhibit conduct disorders, to experience academic problems, and to drop out of school” (Keyes, 2006, p. 395).

Furthermore, schools based in a WRF are not designed to promote cultural health, “a base of resilience and faith, trust and pride in...cultural background” (Ivey et al., 2018, pp. 41-42) for students of color. As discussed earlier, African American students often have to compromise cultural competence in order to achieve academically. Yet, scholars underscore the “protective potential of a racial identity that values race as a core component of self, reinforces the value of African Americans as a group, and does not privilege the cultural assimilation of African Americans as a response to race-based discrimination” (Hope et al., 2015, p. 345). Notably, all of these protective factors run counter to White institutional presence which dominates predominantly White institutions in education (Gusa, 2010). WRF is operationalized in the education system, in part, through the core components of White institutional presence including:

- monoculturalism and assimilation,
- White ascendancy or the supremacy of Whiteness and the devaluation of others,
- White estrangement or segregation, and
- color-blindness (i.e., not viewing race as an important part of identity) (Gusa, 2010).

Consequently, educational institutions often operate in ways that are in fact antithetical to the cultural health of African Americans and people of color. The result is a functionally oppressive education system rather than one that broadly facilitates flourishing.

With growing recognition that “students can’t learn when they are not healthy” (Jackson & Schlitt, 2019), flourishing has been associated with student engagement and positive academic achievement (Datu, 2018). Helping students flourish as social, emotional, and cultural beings requires adequate numbers of culturally competent personnel

including psychologists, social workers, and counselors in schools alongside teachers. Yet, the state of Minnesota has one of the worst counselors to students ratios in the nation. Whereas the American Counseling Association advocates for a ratio of one counselor for every 250 students, the national average is 1:482, and in the state of Minnesota the average is 1:723 (KARE, 2018). How psychologists, social workers, and counselors are funded in schools and represented through teachers' contracts may contribute to the problem. An education system organized around mattering, flourishing, and elevating student voice employs adequate numbers of culturally competent personnel including recommended ratios of counselors, social workers, and psychologists capable of advancing cultural health, hearing student voices, and meeting students' needs.

## Love

The final organizing principle for elevating student voice and creating more inclusive school environments is love. As articulated by Martin Luther King, Jr: "*Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.*" Addressing inequity in education requires love at all levels.

Love has the power to humanize. People comprise the building blocks of systems, and perpetuate a WRF that devalues and dehumanizes people who are not White. From chattel slavery to separate-but-equal to redlining to the separation of children from their families at the Southern border, the WRF that dehumanizes people of color using animalistic images and language operates at the systems and institutions level (e.g., policies) and at the individual level. Whiteness as the cultural norm for beauty, sophistication, intelligence, and virtuousness essentially casts Blackness as its opposite (Feagin, 2013). In schools, this may play out as Black children and children of color being cast as loud and unruly (in contrast to *emotional vitality* proposed by the founder of Black Psychology, Joseph White). Being generally considered less intelligent and less sophisticated, perhaps due to poor upbringing or coming from cultures that do not value education (i.e., cultural inferiority), Black and brown kids may end up under-represented in gifted and talented or International Baccalaureate programs but over-represented in special education and remedial programs. Moreover, a dominant cultural narrative embedded in systems of education that view people of color as less virtuous than those who are White, may easily result in inequitable applications of discipline, particularly for subjective behaviors where Black and brown children are disciplined more frequently and harshly.

The WRF is a tool of oppression, not love. Organizing education around love requires dismantling the WRF already institutionalized throughout the U.S. education system. This means observing, analyzing, documenting, and correcting the ways in which this grand social narrative drives education and is further operationalized via White institutional presence; Gusa, 2010). This is not a simple question of segregation or integration. For instance, even though White estrangement or segregation is a feature of White institutional presence, integrated environments may work to reify White ascendancy (i.e., superiority) in ways that racially-affirming, segregated counterspaces do not; counterspaces are those that resist deficit notions of people of color (Grier-Reed et al., 2018; Gusa, 2010). Put another way, for people of color integrated, spaces in education may be racially oppressive, whereas *segregated spaces may be culturally affirming*. Advancing racial equity extends beyond mere contact (bringing people in close proximity with each other); it requires love at all levels.

According to theologian Paul Tillich, the first duty of love is to listen. Consider the finding that a mere 10 second clip of a teacher's voice or face is enough for viewers young and old to tell whether a teacher likes and admires a child (Willis & Todorov, 2006). Consider the finding that ostracism elicits increased activity in brain areas such as the anterior cingulate cortex that also respond to physical pain (Kross et al., 2011). Moreover, feeling excluded has been linked to self-defeating behavior, underperformance, lack of empathy, and aggression (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002; Maner et al., 2007; Twenge et al., 2001, 2002, 2007). In contrast, feeling love, the opposite of ostracism, activates the brain's reward systems (Younger et al., 2010). Even in the earliest stages of life, infants who are held, cuddled, and in other words loved, flourish, develop faster neurologically, and gain weight more rapidly (Field & Hernandez-Rief, 2007). The need to belong, feel included, and loved is perhaps the most basic human need.



Education based in love recognizes the fundamental human need to connect and provides opportunities for students to matter. Love at the center of education counteracts the dehumanization embedded in a WRF that is driven by standardized test scores and pre-packaged curricula. Teaching as an act of love is inclusive, relational, and makes room for student voice. Love is listening, and an education system organized around love is one in which students' relationships to teachers, to each other, and to the institution are carefully and constantly cultivated, tended, and mended.

### **Reimagine Teaching and Learning: From Compliance and Control to Inclusion and Engagement**

A nuanced examination of how the WRF functions as a racialized form of control in education (Heitzeg, 2015) is a requisite part of moving from a culture of compliance to a culture of inclusion and engagement. For school cultures rooted in assimilation, standardization, and compliance, it is a small step to zero tolerance policies. The tendency is to seek to control rather than to elevate student voice. This culture of compliance and control tends to operate at all levels, where those who are not easily controlled or assimilated to the school environment are then pushed out and excluded, e.g., through zero tolerance disciplinary practices which contribute to racial inequity (American Psychological Association, 2008). Education organized around mattering, flourishing, and love is also organized around relationships, and where in the words of MLK, "Power... is love implementing the demands of justice."

### **Relational Education**

Relational education is dynamic and reciprocal where both teachers and students are knowers as well as learners (Raider-Roth, 2005). This dynamic has potential for disrupting the WRF in the classroom, where the WRF situates Whiteness as synonymous with intelligence and superiority (we noted earlier that 94% of teachers in Minnesota are White). Viewing students as potential partners with perspectives, insight, identities, cultures, and feelings that contribute to the process of teaching and learning, relational education decenters the teacher and creates space for students in ways that are asset-based rather than deficit-oriented.

Trust is the basis for believing that students have valuable insight, perspective, and knowledge to enrich the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Importantly, Feagin (2013) asserts that the WRF includes racialized emotions such as fear and mistrust that may contribute to a culture of control and compliance. Whereas trust creates openness, fear generates a need to control. Trust is generated through safe, nurturing environments organized around love, where love is listening. To allow each other to be knowers and learners in the educational space, teachers must trust students and students must trust teachers.

When teachers do not trust students to contribute as partners in the process of teaching and learning, student voice tends to be sacrificed for maintaining control and emphasizing compliance in the classroom and throughout the school. Creating more inclusive school climates means addressing racialized emotions such as fear and mistrust, decentering Whiteness, and sharing power. This includes an examination of how the WRF is institutionalized along with the ways in which White institutional presence are operationalized in schools and in education policy. This also includes training teachers to navigate the complexities of power with students in diverse classrooms. Cultures of control and compliance tend to rely on coercive power; that is, threats of force and punishment to manage student behavior (French & Raven, 1959). However, there are other realms of power to draw from including referent power, expert power, and legitimate power, and teachers must be equipped to engage and utilize these other sources of power (French & Raven, 1959).

A relational approach to education tends to draw more from referent, expert, and legitimate sources of power than from coercive sources. Legitimate power is the power teachers hold because of their position and authority in the school. Expert power is the influence teachers hold because of their specialized knowledge, e.g., teachers as knowers. Cultures of control and compliance may tend toward expert, legitimate, and coercive power. This is a combination that can be threatened-by instead of inclusive-of the elevation of student voice. On the other hand, when teachers bond with their students, their expert power is enhanced. They have deep knowledge of who their students are, with

deep knowledge of the subject matter. Furthermore, when teachers are able to develop and exert referent power, they are more capable of creating an inclusive classroom.

Referent power is really relational power stemming from bonds of connection and affection; that is, the power teachers hold comes from the respect, admiration, and affection students have for them. For teachers strong in referent power, students' desire for approval is high along with the instructor's ability to wield influence. When combined with expert and legitimate power, culturally competent teachers strong in referent power may be most effective in elevating student voice and sharing space.

A nuanced understanding of power is essential to relational education, with understanding the cycle of caring (Raider-Roth, 2005; Skovholt, 2001). The cycle of caring involves empathy and attachment along with ruptures and tears (Skovholt, 2001). It is a dynamic engagement and disengagement process, and teachers must be supported in understanding and navigating the caring cycle, particularly with respect to repairing the inevitable ruptures and tears that occur in relationships with racially diverse students. Schools committed to a climate of inclusion and elevating student voice must be attuned simultaneously to teachers' cultural competence, ability to share power, and capacity to develop and repair relationships with students.

### **Constructivist and Inclusive Pedagogy**

Finally, schools can elevate student voice and push back against a WRF through inclusive curricula, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and project-based learning. Educators today are fond of touting that they are preparing students for jobs that do not exist yet. But we should ask: *Is this really the case?* Twenty-first century skills demand the ability to effectively engage with complex and ill-structured problems. This includes the capacity to iteratively imagine, hypothesize, and investigate. To prepare for the 21st century knowledge economy, students need opportunities to co-construct knowledge in order to solve problems. They need practice navigating systems, engaging in divergent thinking, and participating in creative problem solving in teams and across groups. This new century fueled by technological revolution requires a generation of critical consumers of information as well as knowledge creators.

Constructivist approaches to teaching and learning that embody 21st century skills and culturally sustaining pedagogy align well with a climate of inclusion that elevates student voice. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is asset based and "aims to sustain children's and youth's linguistic and cultural practices" (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016, p. 306). Teachers are prodded to consider how curricula address the lives, communities, cultures, and identities of students, including their questions about the world and the ways in which they construct meaning (Grier-Reed & Williams-Wengerd, 2018). Project-based learning invites students to define and solve real-world problems in ways that can help them flourish and tap into their potential as people and as citizens. Moreover, constructivist classrooms encourage and expect teachers to move fluidly between the roles of knower and learner.

Situating students as partners who co-construct knowledge in the process of teaching and learning, constructivist pedagogy by nature emphasizes shared power and student voice in the classroom. Moreover, integrating culturally sustaining pedagogy with genuine questioning and authentic dialogue allows students to be more fully humanized and multi-dimensional than in classrooms where teaching and learning is simply about regurgitating the right/standard answer or saying what the teacher wants/expects to hear. In short, connected and inclusive pedagogies make room for student voice, student identities, and student questioning. Student-centered and inclusive, constructivist and culturally sustaining approaches to education facilitate teaching as an act of love, where love is listening.

### **Practical Next Steps**

This section presents practical next steps for moving toward a more inclusive school culture that elevates student voice, but without a fundamental reimagining of the basic organizing principles and cultural narratives underlying schools and the education system discussed in the previous sections, these steps are inadequate. Moving toward a more inclusive school culture is a dynamic and iterative process, and these recommendations are a culmination of steps that

stem from the previous discussion. Nine recommendations focus on creating space, engaging in self-criticism, and increasing capacity.

### Create Space (Recommendations 1-3)

One of the ways schools have been organized is around the primary conception of students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Students arrive early in the morning and spend much of the day sitting and listening in 50-minute increments as they travel successively from subject to subject over the course of a 6-9 hour day with minimal freedom to play and talk with each other. For many adults, this would be a challenging day after day, and it is certainly not the environment that comes to mind when envisioning the campuses of massively successful high tech companies in which employees are encouraged to flourish and are given free time to imagine, play, and create. Students are not empty vessels to be filled, and schools must be prepared to meet them where they are. This includes attending to the lived experiences and emotional needs of students on par with academic subjects. Recommendations 1-3 focus on creating space for students' lived experience, cultural identities, and inner life.

- 1. Provide structured time for all students to reset, release, and recalibrate through the day.** Pressure to maintain a standard curricular pace can lead teachers to devalue or tune out students' restorative needs. For example, having an extra 15 minutes at the end of class might be seen first as an opportunity to get ahead in the curriculum to meet milestones rather than as an opportunity for students to recalibrate and reset before transitioning to the next part of their day.

In a culture of standardization that prioritizes control and compliance, valuing time for students to release might be seen as goofing off or depriving students of instruction or valuable time on task. Moreover, evaluating teacher performance based on student performance may further pressure teachers to prioritize content over everything else. However, time to reset, release, and recalibrate is important and should be a regular part of students' educational day. This could be at the beginning and end of each class. The point is that an inclusive school climate, focused on elevating student voice, values and takes time to acknowledge the inner lives of students, multiple times a day, on a basic level.

- 2. Create student-centered spaces that are facilitated by adults in which students can problem solve together about conflicts and issues in their lives.** In a study of African American high school students (Gbolo & Grier-Reed, 2016), students complained about not having time to talk with each other, perhaps passing each other in the hallway but not really having space to work out problems and interpersonal conflicts which led to a tendency for issues to escalate. The African American Student Network (AFAM) was a space in their school where they could come together during the school day and discuss the issues on their minds with attentive adults. For these African American students, having a space like AFAM facilitated voice and generated feelings of safety, support, empowerment, affirmation, and connectedness, and students wanted more spaces like this at their school.

Peace Circles are another example of this kind of work. Connecting students to each other and to adults at school who listen to them as they sort through the daily struggles of their lives facilitates love and helps students know that they matter. These connections can also promote culturally inclusive social and physical spaces in schools that provide opportunities for students to identify strengths, value culture, work through problems, and flourish.

- 3. Develop curricula and structure classrooms that address the lived experience of students.** Consider the words of Cathy Davidson (2019), author of *The New Education*:

| What if the classroom were structured as a training ground for life beyond school? For addressing

problems without answers? For asking tough questions? For inclusion and participation? For collaboration and community? For critical thinking leading to creative activism? For navigating technology and new publics? For workforce readiness and *world* readiness?

This is a 21st century classroom. The American Psychological Association defines total participation as “teaching techniques that solicit participation and higher order thinking from all students at the same time” (Davidson, 2019). This includes activities designed to help students matter and to elevate student voice including entry and exit tickets, think-pair-share, and asking what else, for example: What else should we have covered or talked about today that we didn’t?

Moreover, project/problem-based learning, placemaking, spacemaking, community mapping, photovoice, and YPAR engage culturally sustaining pedagogies that create culturally inclusive social and physical environments at school by integrating the lived experience, identities, and voice of students (see links to these in the Resource section). With an emphasis on meaning-making, these activities place students at the center of the curriculum, situating them as partners in the process of teaching and learning, as knowers as well as learners. These are the kinds of activities that facilitate a truly inclusive school climate—not simply fitting students into the curriculum but building a curriculum around the students.

#### **Engaging Student Leadership and Self-Criticism (Recommendations 4-6)**

As previously mentioned, creating a more inclusive school culture and elevating student voice is iterative and dynamic. To effectively engage this iterative and dynamic process, robust structures of self-criticism are necessary at every level, but particularly at the school level. This includes imbuing students with the leadership and authority to participate in structures of self-criticism. This also includes effectively using data to set goals, identify milestones, and measure progress. Recommendations 4-6 focus on engaging student leadership, self-criticism, and data.

- 4. Develop robust student government that includes a class President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary for each grade along with faculty advocates.** Elevating student voice means developing student leaders. Robust student government in which each grade has the opportunity to elect representatives provides all students in the school with the opportunity to exercise their voice in choosing who will represent them. Moreover, elected leaders are imbued with the power to speak for their classmates and to develop their voices as leaders. Guidance and support from faculty advocates can help students flourish in these roles as a cohort of leaders across grades in the school.

Student leaders must also have (a) seats on decision-making bodies at their school such as hiring committees, disciplinary committees, and governing bodies (see recommendation #5); (b) opportunities to provide leadership through activities such as peer mediation; and (c) voices at the district and state level.

- 5. Organize structures of self-criticism that include students.** Robust structures of self-criticism that include student voices are essential to elevate student voice and create a culture of inclusion. This calls for a governing body at the school level that includes students (e.g., student body presidents, data scientist interns) as well as cultural liaisons, parents, and personnel such as data scientists, administrators, counselors, and teachers, to provide an ongoing assessment of equity, including (a) the balance between control and compliance, inclusion and engagement; (b) an examination of the ways in which the WRF is institutionalized via policy and practices; and (c) an assessment of White institutional presence within and across schools. Including student representatives, these structures of self-criticism should be mirrored at district and state levels.
- 6. Include a data scientist in each school.** Just because schools collect data does not mean they (a) read it, (b) understand it, nor (c) know what to do about it (even if they understood it). Yet schools are expected to engage in data driven decision-making even though they often lack the in-house expertise and support to take on

this feat. Support data-driven decision-making by hiring data scientists in schools, and using school level data to inform self-criticism and an ongoing assessment of racial equity. This may include examinations of racial equity with respect to (a) disciplinary referrals for disruption, defiance, and disrespect; (b) racial demographics for honors, International Baccalaureate, and gifted and talented programs versus general and special education programs; and (c) representation among leadership positions for students and staff.

### **Increasing Capacity (Recommendations 7-9)**

Elevating student voice is of no avail if there are no adults there to listen, care, and respond. Increasing capacity is about increasing the capacity of schools to listen, care, and respond to students and includes factors that go beyond the scope of this section of the report including for example, attracting and developing talented professionals.

Recommendations 7-9 focus on increasing capacity through the lens of being responsive to students.

- 7. Include intern positions for students in the Office of the Data Scientist.** As a continuation of Recommendation #6, the focus here is on listening and responding to student voices through data many schools already collect, but may not appropriately understand, interpret, or act upon and data schools need to collect but currently do not have the capacity to do so. An in-house data scientist can increase schools' capacity to collect and engage data in ways that elevate student voice and advance racial equity. For example, schools may find that they need to ask different or more nuanced questions. Data Scientist Intern positions for students can advance a culture of inclusion by bringing more students to the table. Not only is this ripe with opportunity for problem-based and project-based learning, but it provides opportunities for students to develop 21st century skills—engaging with ill-structured problems, critically consuming information, and creating knowledge to assist in data-driven decision-making at their school.
- 8. Seek to achieve ratios of school psychologists (500-700:1), school counselors (250:1), and social workers (250:1) recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the American Counseling Association (ACA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), respectively.** Adequate levels of culturally competent personnel such as counselors, psychologists, and social workers with highly developed capacities to see and hear students are essential for an inclusive culture that elevates student voice. Not only is there an increasing level of need with respect to mental health, but many students are also experiencing food insecurity, homelessness, and traumatic life circumstances. Moreover, attending to the cultural health and identities of students is important. Meeting students where they are and helping them flourish means being responsive to their needs. Schools simply must have adequate personnel to do this work which may require re-examining how counselors, psychologists, and social workers are represented in schools.
- 9. Create a Professional Greenhouse for teachers at work.** In addition to adequate numbers of culturally competent social workers, psychologists, and counselors, teachers must be culturally competent and well supported to attend to student needs. The high touch work of listening to students, building curricula around them, cultivating and navigating power in the classroom, and consistently engaging in the cycle of caring is high burnout work. To foster teachers' ability to care for and nurture students, teachers must be developed, cared for, and nurtured themselves.

Skovholt (2001) called this “creating a professional greenhouse at work,” in his seminal work on burnout prevention and self-care. For teachers' professional greenhouse, ongoing support for relational education, cultural competence, and constructivist culturally sustaining pedagogy is important, including navigating power and the cycle of caring that consists of repairing the inevitable ruptures and tears that occur in relationships with students.

Teachers' professional greenhouses should include restorative practices that increase and develop teachers' ability to care, to love, and to respond to the needs of students. These should be a regular part of the workday.

These may take the form of release time, yoga, communities of practice, or even teacher circles that help teachers reset, recalibrate, and problem-solve each day.

On a systemic level, reconsidering how teachers are evaluated may be in order. In low performing schools, for example, connecting teacher evaluations to student performance can be demoralizing and exacerbate a brain drain resulting in the loss or disinterest of talented teachers. Highly qualified, culturally competent teachers are valuable resources that should be retained. Moreover, in the racialized context of education, where low performing schools often predominantly comprise children of color, a critical examination of how the system reifies a WRF is in order, including the examination of policies such as school choice.

Building a professional greenhouse for teachers at work must be part of a system that does not concentrate high quality teachers in high quality schools and low quality teachers in failing schools, signaling parents with resources (who are disproportionately White in Minnesota with some of the worst economic disparities in the nation) to choose a better school, further contributing to the resource drain.

## Conclusion

These recommendations do not exonerate the state or the system from structurally intervening to create integrated schools. However, this discussion extends beyond segregation and integration, and is ultimately a discussion of racial equity.

- We need to examine structural forces that create barriers to prioritizing relationships with students and inclusive and culturally sustaining pedagogies.
- We need to examine the allocation of important human resources such as teachers, counselors, social workers, and psychologists across schools.
- We need to address racial segregation and racial equity.

Yet, *integrated schools are not necessarily equitable schools*; racial justice and racial equity are not simply a function of integration. Racial justice is aspirational, and the work of achieving racial equity is iterative. The answers in this new century may necessarily deviate from the past. Nevertheless, as the bedrock for meritocracy and progress in this country, the public education system has a fundamental responsibility to take on and redress the longstanding, embedded, institutionalized racism powered by a White racial frame.

## Resources for Practitioners

### Minnesota Resources

MN Department of Human Rights

Education Discrimination: Suspension and Expulsion

<https://mn.gov/mdhr/news-community/partnerships/suspension-and-expulsion/>

### Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Placemaking (from Rural Schools Collaborative)

<http://ruralschoolscollaborative.org/stories/placemaking-and-schools>

Spacemaking

<http://www.makerspaceforeducation.com/>

Makerspace Playbook

<https://makerspaces.make.co/playbook/>



Community Mapping (from Oasis Center)

<https://oasiscenter.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=17570152e8c14d4eb7331762ec0178eb>

Community Youth Mapping Tool (from USAID)

[https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pnadz225.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadz225.pdf)

Photovoice (from Pathways to Positive Futures)

<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj5-photovoice.pdf>

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR, from Youthprise)

<https://youthprise.org/funding/grants/ypar-grants/>

Youthprise also has a comprehensive YPAR Toolkit to guide youth through the process.

# Student Voice

## *Part Two: Learning, Cognition, & Student Voice*

Student voice must be highlighted in school systems, communities, and classrooms. This focus increases the likelihood that learners will encounter student-centered educational experiences that are engaging and meaningful. These types of learning experiences are also more likely to enhance their motivation for learning. Theories of learning and cognition have long recognized students as active learners who seek new knowledge and construct new understandings as they integrate new and pre-existing ideas. These types of theories are in the broad category of constructivist learning theories. Student-centered learning experiences that are designed from a constructivist perspective are naturally culturally responsive because they recognize that students create their own understandings based on classroom and out-of-classroom experiences.

Curriculum materials and instructional practices that build on our knowledge of learning and cognition are more likely to meet the needs of all learners. Education research that focuses on creating culturally responsive education experiences is rooted in theories of learning and cognition (Bransford et al., 2000; Linn & Eylon, 2011). For example, the Knowledge Integration framework (Figure 3) identifies four main processes that promote learning: elicit ideas, add ideas, use evidence to develop criteria for distinguishing among ideas, and sort or reflect and integrate ideas. Researchers have shown that using this framework as a guide for designing curriculum materials leads to increased learning for middle and high school students (Clark, Varma, McElhaney, & Chiu, 2008; Linn et al., 2006, Varma & Linn, 2012). It is important to note that this constructivist framework begins with student voice (elicit ideas) and has space for teachers to support students to incorporate new knowledge.

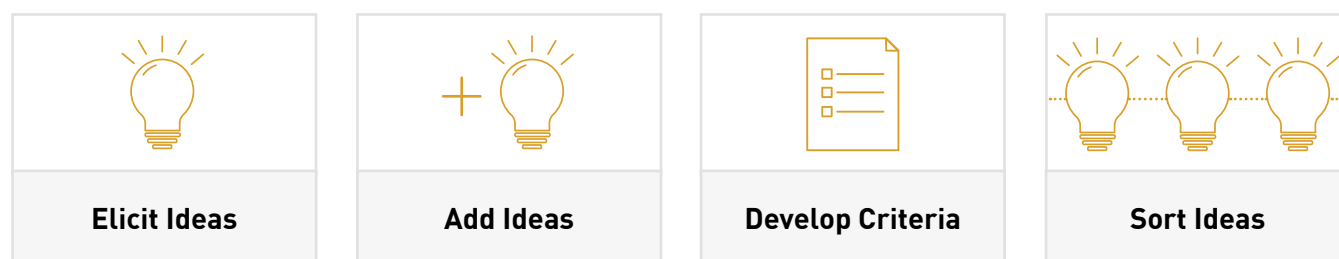


Figure 3. *The Knowledge Integration Framework*

### **Teacher Development and Student Voice**

Teachers have multiple opportunities to learn about student learning in their pre-service preparation programs, professional conferences, and in-service training. Most understand that learning involves students actively reconciling new ideas and information with their pre-existing knowledge. Many also know that learning is most meaningful when students are able to make connections between academic ideas and personally relevant knowledge. Teachers will need professional development opportunities and ongoing guidance in order to create culturally responsive spaces and learning experiences for students. Teachers must understand how privilege, political and social power play a systemic role in how education is structured. Teachers should have opportunities to reflect on their own assumptions about students, parents, and communities in order to recognize the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy.

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Student Voice

One interpretation of the discrepancy in achievement between White and marginalized students is that many students navigate identity shifts in school. That is, many marginalized students are forced to simultaneously live in two worlds; one in which their home culture exists and the other is mainstream culture (Teranishi, 2002; Winant, 1998). The system for schooling in the U.S. typically perpetuates mainstream culture which unintentionally further marginalizes the voices and experiences of immigrant and minority families (Gullickson et al., under review).

Knowledge is both situated and culture-bound. Students have familial and cultural knowledge that shapes their identity as students and young citizens. (See Adult Behaviors.) González, Andrade, Civil, and Moll (2001) define funds of knowledge as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 116). They further explain that community issues, home experiences, and students’ social capital are entry points for engaging students in curriculum (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001). All of this supports the idea that students should not have to hide their cultural identities in order to pursue academic success. In fact, students’ cultural integrity must be upheld in order to promote academic success. (See [Cultural Competence and Inclusivity](#).)

As an example of their commitment to creating culturally responsive learning experiences, MDE is encouraging teachers to incorporate diverse perspectives and cultural knowledge in their science instruction through the revision of the science standards (see the resource link below). School systems can support culturally responsive education practices via multiple approaches and practices.

- Recognizing how learning happens is crucial. All students learn new information best when they are afforded opportunities to make connections between the new knowledge, their prior knowledge, and their lived experiences.
- Teachers should be allowed the space to create lessons and units that are tied to students’ communities so that the academic knowledge they are teaching becomes more meaningful to them and their families.

## Resources for Practitioners

Empowering Youth Voice (from the CASEL SEL Trends series)

<https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SEL-Trends-Youth-Voice.pdf>

Student Voice Committees, an initiative of Chicago Public Schools to support student-adult partnerships)

<https://cps.edu/Pages/StudentVoiceCommittee.aspx>

Strength in Voices Conference, an initiative of Washoe County Schools in Nevada, includes a student-led data symposium, learning communities providing additional resources, a student voice blog, and many other opportunities.

<https://www.washoeschools.net/Page/12921>

Minnesota Department of Education (next generation science standards address culture)

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/>

# Personalized Education

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## Overview

The Reimagine Minnesota report identifies “Personalized Education: Prioritize and ensure personalized education with emphasis on acceleration vs. intervention” as a key strategy in achieving its goal of “creating lasting equality and excellence in education for all students.” There are four desired outcomes of this strategy (p. 8):

1. unified definition and vision of personalized learning;
2. personalized learning embedded in academic content standards and system;
3. practical guide for relationship building; and
4. practical guide for implementing personalized education.

The report also provides examples of action steps related to personalized education: (a) create a common definition and vision of personalized learning; (b) advocate for personalized learning in state content standards; (c) establish a model for building relationships with students, and (d) provide technical assistance and support for personalized learning.

This section builds upon and deepens these identified outcomes and action plans through sharing definitions and conceptualizations of personalized education including its components; outlining theoretical and conceptual frameworks that support personalized education; providing practical recommendations, and identifying resources to support Minnesota districts, schools, administrators, and policy makers in exploring and implementing personalized learning.

## Definitions and Conceptualizations of Personalized Learning

There are many ways to define and conceptualize personalized learning. The list provided in this section highlights conceptualizations that are commonly accepted and used by organizations and schools within the state and across the country. This list is informed by research and grounded in strong teaching/learning practices, and is intended to be used as a guide to assist in the designing and implementing of personalized education in K-12 education.

- Personalized learning prioritizes a clear understanding of the needs and goals of each individual student and the tailoring of instruction to address those needs and goals. These needs and goals, and progress toward meeting them, are highly visible and easily accessible to teachers, students, and families. Needs, goals, and progress are frequently discussed among all parties and updated accordingly (Pane et al., 2017).
- Personalized learning environments are designed to give students greater ownership of their learning and aim to tailor instruction according to individual learner readiness, strengths, needs, and interests. Components of personalized learning environments may encompass learner-driven content and pace of instruction, project-based learning, individualized learning plans, competency-based progression, blended learning, performance-based assessments, and student portfolios of work. (See the links to CCSSO resources below.)
- Learners are active participants in setting goals, planning learning paths, tracking progress and determining how learning will be demonstrated. At any given time, learning objectives, content, methods and pacing are likely to vary from learner to learner as they pursue proficiency relative to established standards. (See the link to Institute for Personalized Learning below.)
- Tailoring learning for each student’s strengths, needs and interests—including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn—to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible. (See the link to iNACOL.)
- Systems and approaches that deepen student learning by incorporating each student’s interests, strengths and

needs – including student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn – to achieve the goals of active engagement, academic success, and preparation for post-secondary opportunities. Although often less formalized, personalized learning and personalized instructional approaches are critical to students in kindergarten through grade 6 as well. (See the link to Vermont Agency of Education.)

## Connections to Differentiation

Although there are efforts to distinguish personalized education from differentiation, the two concepts are similar in goals, purposes, and strategies. The descriptions below of differentiation are provided for clarity as well as for providing connections to this older, perhaps more familiar concept (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allen, 2000) in order to build bridges/support efforts related to newer conceptualizations of personalized education that incorporate student voice and agency.

## Differentiation

Students vary in culture, socioeconomic status, language, gender, motivation, ability/disability, personal interests and more, and teachers must be aware of this variation as they plan curriculum. By considering varied learning needs, teachers can develop personalized instruction so that all children in the classroom can learn effectively. Differentiated classrooms are ones where educators respond to student variation in readiness levels, interests and learning profiles.

Differentiating instruction is not a single strategy or practice but rather an approach that utilizes research-based instructional and organizational practices to tailor instruction to meet individual needs. Differentiation typically entails modifications to *practice* (how teachers deliver instruction to students), *process* (how the lesson is designed for students), *products* (the kinds of work products students will be asked to complete), *content* (the specific readings, research, or materials students will study), *assessment* (how teachers measure what students have learned), and *grouping* (how students are arranged in the classroom or paired up with other students).

Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction. Some examples of differentiated instruction include (Tomlinson, 1999):

- using various grouping practices such as small groups, pairs, and one-on-one instruction;
- modifying assignments so that all students can participate in learning;
- providing opportunities for students to respond in multiple ways including writing, orally, and by providing responses to peers; and
- using effective instructional strategies such as reteaching, using multiple examples, and teaching strategies for how to read, complete math problems, or remember content.

## Components, Strategies, Practices, & Elements of Personalized Education

There are multiple components, strategies, practices, and elements of personalized education that form a supportive ecosystem of learning and teaching at individual, classroom, school, and district levels in support of educational equity. Combinations of these elements are used in spaces where personalized learning is effective and have been demonstrated through research to be effective (e.g., Friend et al., 2017; Pane, Steiner, Baird, & Hamilton, 2015; Pane, Steiner, Baird, Hamilton, & Pane, 2017; Ray, Sacks, & Twyan, 2017).

## Personalized learning plans/learner profiles

A record of each student's individual strengths, skills, skill gaps, academic aspirations, needs, motivations, progress and goals based on data. Plans document student progress toward both individual goals and classroom/school learning targets. Plans identify practices and accommodations (formal and informal) designed to improve learning outcomes including those not indicated on IEPs (incorporating language-based elements for English learners).

These plans are co-created by students and teachers supporting differentiated, student-centered learning. These asset-based plans honor multiple ways of knowing and learning with a focus on problem-solving, critical thinking, meaningful projects, and collaboration. Personalized learning plans/profiles are facets of culturally sustaining pedagogies that sustain student linguistic and cultural practices.

### **Personalized learning paths**

Based on personalized learning plans, the creation of unique, specific paths students can take through content/curriculum to enact their educational plans and learning, career, and employment goals.

### **Competency-based progression**

Students work at their own pace, make progress, and earn credit as soon as they demonstrate mastery.

Competency-based progressions remove constraints on what material each student works on, when, and for how long. The focus is on individual competency and not standardized test scores. Integrated, performance-based assessments and real-time feedback on progress are important. (See [Student Voice](#).)

### **Flexible learning environments**

The structure and pacing of learning time and student grouping strategies are flexible, responsive to student needs, data driven, and involve technology that is accessible and available to all students. Learning can happen outside of the classroom and school day, and can include blended and online learning opportunities – anytime, anywhere.

### **Student agency/student-centered learning**

Students have more ownership of their learning; they make choices with their teachers about how they learn best and how they show what they know. Students are able to learn in ways that connect to their interests and needs. (See [Student Voice](#).)

### **Embracing culture & diversity**

Considering a students' context and history, adapting teaching pedagogies, and incorporating social experiences outside of schools are strategies educators can use to embrace students' cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic diversity in support of learning. Teacher training on cultural responsiveness, pedagogical strategies, and nurturing of school/community relationships are key in creating safe, empowering learning environments. (See [Cultural Competence](#) and [Adult Behaviors](#).)

### **Use of data**

Teachers use multiple types of data to understand student progress and make instructional decisions as needed. Frequent feedback from teachers and peers is incorporated when appropriate. Use of data provides teachers with the ability to better acknowledge, assess, and support individual student needs. (See [Student Voice](#).)

### **Use of technology**

Technology can support personalized learning through enabling differentiated instructional approaches, blended learning environments, and access to high-quality content and assessments. Technology can support a digital home for personalized learning plans so families can access, comment on, advocate for, and encourage students' progress and share information with educators. (See [Community Bridges](#).)

### **Application of universal design principles for learning (UDL) and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)**

These two frameworks must be used in order for all learners, including students with disabilities and underserved students, to fully benefit from personalized learning. UDL is an approach focused on increasing student access



to materials and multiple modes of instruction, and fostering the development of curricula to support access, participation, and progress in all facets of learning. MTSS provides supports and interventions to students through the system-wide use of evidence-based practices of varying intensity and data based decision-making in responses to individual academic and other needs.

### **Creation and sustainability of community**

Personalized learning involves many people, which is why the creation and sustainability of community is important. Students, teachers, counselors, administrators, families, mentors, elders, and coaches, within and outside of school, participate in students' learning. Transparency, support, participation, communication, and respect between members of students' learning communities is paramount. (See [Community Bridges](#).)

## **Frameworks and Principles That Support Personalized Learning**

### **Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)**

Faced with challenging standards, complex curricula, and diverse student needs, many school districts are adopting various frameworks to address the need to accelerate academic growth through personalizing the learning process. Given the expanding needs of a diverse student body, school systems are changing the design of school-site operations to combine academic, social, and emotional practices within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework (Burns & Gibbons, 2012; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Ruffini et al., 2016). MTSS is designed to respond to academic, social, and emotional needs of students by providing graduated services, commonly referred to as tiers of instruction. Congress enacted the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) defining MTSS as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to student needs, with regular observation to facilitate data based instructional decision-making” (Title IX, Sec. 8002(33)). Congress implicitly acknowledged that schools facing challenges with students that struggle in behavior and academics should “implement a school-wide tiered model to prevent and address problem behavior, and early intervening services, coordinated with similar activities and services under the IDEA” (Sec. 1114(7)). With strong empirical support, the MTSS framework could inform personalized learning practices for all learners.

MTSS typically includes four components (Burns & VanDerHeyden, 2006): (a) systematic use of assessment data, (b) to efficiently allocate resources and (c) to enhance learning (d) for all students. The goal is to seek instruction and intervention that will allow a child to be successful rather than identifying children for whom previous and presumed future interventions lacked success. The resource allocation model of MTSS functionally places the primary jurisdiction over MTSS in general education. Therefore, it is most effectively accomplished through a three-tiered model of increasing intensity of service and frequency of assessment (Tilly, 2003), all of which are operated by general education. Tier 1 involves quality universal instruction in general education and benchmark assessments to screen students and monitor progress in learning. Students who do not make adequate progress in universal instruction receive additional support in Tier 2 (approximately 15% to 20%), through small-group interventions. Tier 2 interventions have a standardized component to assure efficiency and are delivered in groups of four to six students. Tier 3 consists of more intensive and individualized supports for students who are not successful with supplemental instruction alone. These interventions are matched to a student's identified skill deficit. Tier 3 may include special education services; however, there will always be some students who need intensive support who do not qualify for special education services.

### **Universal design principles for learning (UDL)**

In order for all learners to fully benefit from personalized learning, UDL must be used. The UDL framework ensures that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities through providing learners with multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression. Aligned with the goals of personalized learning, UDL is an approach focused on increasing student

access to materials and multiple modes of instruction, and fostering the development of curricula to support access, participation, and progress in all facets of learning. MTSS provides support to students through the system-wide use of evidence-based practices of varying intensity and data based decision making in responses to individual academic and other needs.

## Technology

One popular mechanism for supporting personalized education in schools is providing technology devices (tablets, laptops) to every student. This strategy is often referred to as a 1:1 initiative (one device for one student). In Minnesota, over half of schools have 1:1 programs (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016). One of the allures of 1:1 initiatives is that they help support personalizing learning through the networked capabilities of technological devices. Although there is potential for technology to support personalized education, technology integration in schools often simply reifies existing inequities.

The digital divide refers to social stratification due to unequal ability to access, adapt, and create knowledge through the use of technologies (Warschauer, 2011). This divide was initially about access to technology; however, today this problem is also concerned with and complicated by social and contextual factors – geographic, economic, racial, ethnic, educational, and gender demographics (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). The current divide is one of use, participation, literacy, and practice. For example, there are differences in the types of learning activities students typically engage in using technology that are indicative of economic inequalities – creation and evaluation activities are more prevalent in affluent communities compared to skill and drill activities that are more prevalent in lower socioeconomic communities. All students should use technology in support of meaningful, engaged, creative, collaborative, critical, inquiry-driven learning. Key factors in making this type of learning possible is providing professional learning opportunities and ongoing coaching of teachers in support of pedagogies that support digital equity and contemporary learning.

## Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Use Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS is an evidence-based model of schooling that uses data based problem solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. The integrated instruction and intervention is delivered to students in varying intensities (multiple tiers) based on student need. Needs-driven decision-making seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students (schools) at the appropriate levels to accelerate the performance of all students to achieve and/or exceed proficiency. Schools interested in personalizing learning and achieving high performance for all students through an MTSS framework should implement the following components:

1. **Assessment:** Involves screening, progress monitoring, and other supporting assessments and processes used to inform data based decision-making.
  - Universal Screening
    - Universal screening: Measures are given multiple times per school year to all students with procedures in place to ensure implementation accuracy. Universal screening helps identify students at, above, and below grade level standards. These data assist in accurately identifying students at risk of poor learning outcomes, challenging behaviors, and other students in need of significant differentiation (e.g., gifted and talented). In addition, screening data may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of universal instruction.
    - Screening tools: As with all measures, users should select screening tools with evidence of reliability and validity, strong correlations between similar instruments and valued outcomes, and accurate predictions of risk status. Educators should be able to articulate the supporting evidence of the tools.
    - Multiple data points to verify risk: Screening data should be used with at least two other data sources

such as classroom performance, diagnostic assessments, or other state/local assessments to verify decisions about a student's level of risk.

- Progress Monitoring Tools
  - Progress monitoring involves the ongoing and frequent monitoring of student performance that quantifies rates of improvement in academic areas and informs both instructional practice and the development of individualized programs.
  - Selected progress monitoring tools should have strong evidence of reliability and validity, have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal difficulty, specify minimum acceptable growth, and provide benchmarks for end-of-year performance.
  - Progress Monitoring Process
    - Progress monitoring should occur at least monthly for students receiving supplemental intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention.
    - Procedures should be in place to ensure implementation accuracy (appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).
- 2. **Data-Based Decision-Making (DBDM):** Involves using processes to inform instruction, movement within the multi-level system, and disability identification.
  - The mechanism for making decisions about the participation of students in the instruction/intervention levels (a) is data-driven and based on methods with strong validity evidence; (b) involves a broad base of stakeholders; and (c) is operationalized with clear, established decision rules (e.g., movement between levels or tiers, determination of appropriate instruction or interventions).
  - A data system is in place that allows users to document and access individual student-level data (including screening and progress-monitoring data) and instructional decisions. Data are entered in a timely manner and can be represented graphically to support visual review. There should be a process for setting and evaluating goals.
  - Decisions about responsiveness to intervention are based on monitoring data with strong evidence of reliability and validity that reflect improvement or progress toward the attainment of a goal at the end of the intervention, and these decision-making criteria are implemented accurately.
- 3. **Multi-level Instruction:** Includes a school wide, multi-level system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure commonly represented by a three-tiered triangle.
  - Universal Instruction (Tier 1) is the curriculum and instruction that all students receive in the general education setting.
    - Research-based curriculum materials: All universal curriculum materials are research-based for the target population of students (including subgroups).
    - Articulation of teaching and learning in and across grade levels: Both of the following conditions are met: (a) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another and (b) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.
    - Differentiated instruction: Both of the following conditions are met: (a) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (b) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use data to identify and address the needs of students.
    - Standards-based: The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.
    - Advocate for personalized learning in standards and curricula. Review, design and implement at

district and classroom levels so that this work can be leveraged during state content standards review cycles.

- Exceeding benchmark: Both of the following conditions are met: (a) the school provides enrichment opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks and (b) teachers implement those opportunities consistently at all grade levels.
- Supplemental Instruction (Tier 2) is additional instruction, above and beyond universal instruction, provided to students who are below (or significantly above) grade level proficiency standards.
  - Evidence based instruction: All interventions are evidence based in content areas and grade levels where they are available.
  - Complements universal instruction: Interventions are well aligned with universal instruction and incorporate foundational skills that support the learning objectives of universal instruction.
  - Instructional characteristics: All three of the following conditions are met: (a) interventions are standardized, (b) interventions are led by staff trained in the intervention according to developer requirements, and (c) group size and dosage are optimal (research based) for the age and needs of students.
  - Addition to universal: Interventions supplement universal instruction.
- Intensive Instruction (Tier 3) is additional instruction that it is highly individualized and well-matched to student needs.
  - Intensive interventions are more intensive than supplemental interventions and are adapted to address individual student needs in a number of ways (e.g., increased duration or frequency, change in interventionist, decreased group size, change in instructional delivery, and change in type of intervention) through an iterative manner based on student data.
  - Instructional characteristics: All of the following conditions are met: (a) the intervention is individualized, (b) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data, and (c) the group size is optimal (research based) for the age and needs of students.
  - Association with universal instruction: Both of the following conditions are met: (a) decisions regarding student participation in both universal instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (b) intensive interventions address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.
  - Create dynamic learner profiles that work with IEPs to guide learning and inform instruction.

**4. Infrastructure:** Captures information regarding the knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of MTSS in a unified system to meet the established goals. Nine areas of infrastructure are identified including:

- Prevention focused: All staff understand that MTSS is a framework to prevent all students, including those with disabilities, from having academic or behavior problems.
- Leadership: Decisions and actions by school and district leaders proactively support the essential components of the MTSS framework at the school, and help make the framework more effective; support for MTSS implementation is a high priority.
- Design, fund, and implement ongoing professional learning for teachers. School-based professional development is institutionalized and structured so that all teachers continuously examine, reflect upon, and improve instructional practice, data based decision making, and delivery of interventions.
- Learning experiences for educators should focus on personalized education fused with equity and diversity lenses; culturally relevant pedagogies; implicit bias training as well as technical and pedagogical strategies to support navigation and use of networked systems and technologies. (See [Adult Behaviors.](#))

- Implement flexible classroom/school/district schedules that accommodate personalized, connected, community-based learning within and outside of school. (See [Student Voice](#).) Schoolwide schedules are aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; adequate additional time is built in for interventions.
  - Resources: Resources are adequately allocated to support MTSS implementation.
  - Align/integrate ISTE standards into curricula scope/sequences and teacher professional learning experiences to support personalized learning practices.
  - Cultural and linguistic responsiveness: Staff can articulate factors they consider when adopting culturally and linguistically relevant instructional practices, assessments, and intervention programs.
    - Align English language development with academic content goals.
    - Attend to the psychological and emotional adjustments that students must make when transitioning from one country and school system to another.
    - Incorporate symbols from students' countries of origin to enhance language acquisition. (See [Cultural Competence](#) and [Student Voice](#).)
  - Communication and parental/family involvement: The school has a description of the MTSS framework available for parents/families, a mechanism to update parents of student progress in interventions, and a process to involve parents/families in decision-making. (See [Community Bridges](#))
  - Communication and staff involvement: There is a description of the school's essential components of MTSS and data based decision-making process shared with staff. A system is in place to keep staff informed, and teacher teams collaborate frequently.
  - Teams: A building MTSS team represents all stakeholders with structures and clear processes in place to guide decision-making. Time is set aside for regular team meetings.
- 5. Fidelity and evaluation:** Involves having a system for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the MTSS framework.
- Fidelity includes the extent to which the district assesses whether elements of the MTSS framework are being implemented as intended.
  - Evaluation is the extent to which (a) a plan is in place for evaluation, (b) a process is in place for reviewing student-level data for all students and for subgroups of students, and (c) a process is in place to evaluate implementation fidelity.

## Examples of Schools Engaging in Personalized Learning/MTSS

### Within Minnesota

Eastern Carver County

<http://www.district112.org/personalized-learning/>

Personalized Learning Summit

<http://personalizedlearningsummit.org>

Spring Lake Park Schools

<https://www.springlakeparkschools.org/academics/personalized-learning>

St. Croix River Education District

<https://www.scred.k12.mn.us/>

Westonka Public Schools – 4 articles describing personalized learning

<https://www.westonka.k12.mn.us/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=20&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=3667&PageID=1>

## National

Breakthrough LEAP Schools in Chicago

<https://www.leapinnovations.org/our-research/personalized-learning-in-practice/>

Center for Response to Intervention

<https://www.rti4success.org/>

Colorado Public Schools

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/mtss>

Florida Problem Solving Project

<http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/>

Heartland Area Education Agency (Iowa)

<https://www.heartlandaea.org/>

National Center for Intensive Intervention

<https://intensiveintervention.org/>

North Carolina Public Schools

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/integratedsystems/mtss/>

## Resources for Practitioners

Aguilar, E., (2013).

*The art of coaching: Effective strategies for school transformation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gibbons, K., Brown, S., & Niebling, B. C. (2018).

*Effective universal instruction: An action-oriented approach to improving Tier 1.* New York, NY: Guilford Publications.

INACOL: International Association of K12 Online Learning [<https://www.inacol.org>]

*A National Landscape Scan of Personalized Learning in K-12 Education in the U.S.*

[https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/iNACOL\\_ANationalLandscapeScanOfPersonalizedLearning.pdf](https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/iNACOL_ANationalLandscapeScanOfPersonalizedLearning.pdf)

*What's Possible with Online Learning? An Overview of Personalized Learning for Schools, Families, & Communities*

[https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/iNACOL\\_Whats-Possible-with-Personalized-Learning.pdf](https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/iNACOL_Whats-Possible-with-Personalized-Learning.pdf)

International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards: Frameworks for students, educators, administrators/leaders, coaches and computer science educators to create innovative digital age learning environments and personalizing learning

<https://www.iste.org/standards>



Jimerson, S. R., Burns, M. K., & VanDerHeyden, A. M. (Eds.). (2015).

*Handbook of response to intervention: The science and practice of multi-tiered systems of support*. New York, NY: Springer.

The Institute of Personalized Learning – definition and model of personalized learning

<http://institute4pl.org/index.php/our-model/>

The Council of Chief State School Officers, The Innovation Lab Network

<https://ccsso.org/topics/innovation-lab-network>

The Council of Chief State School Officers, The America Forward Coalition

<http://www.americaforward.org/our-coalition/about-our-coalition/>

Understanding differentiated instruction: Building a foundation for leadership (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allen, 2000).

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/100216/chapters/Understanding-Differentiated-Instruction@-Building-a-Foundation-for-Leadership.aspx>

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Framework and Guidelines

(<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>)

MTSS Needs Assessment via Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement <https://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/>

Vermont Agency of Education

<https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/personalized-learning/personalized-learning-planning-process>

# Community Bridges

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## Overview

The 2018 Reimagine Minnesota report identifies *build bridges between school and community* as a key strategy in achieving its goal of creating lasting equality and excellence in education for all students. There are five desired outcomes of this strategy (p. 11):

1. consistent expectations for intercultural specialists;
2. community/school whole child support;
3. holistic access to support services for students and families;
4. family, parent, and community participation in district decision-making; and
5. youth development and enrichment during and outside of school.

## Examples of action steps related to personalized education:

- assure consistent certification expectations for intercultural specialists,
- work with community education to build whole child supports,
- build services partnerships to provide wrap-around support for students/families,
- require parent affinity groups in schools and districts based on demographics,
- require parent affinity groups to vote concurrence or non-concurrence, and
- advocate for funding to provide flexible academic support programs in/out of school.

This section builds upon and deepens these identified outcomes and action plans through sharing definitions and conceptualizations of community and family; outlining theoretical and conceptual frameworks that support community bridges; providing practical recommendations; and identifying resources to support state districts, schools, administrators, and policy makers in exploring and implementing community bridges.

## Definitions and Conceptualizations of Community

There are many ways to define and conceptualize community. The ideas provided in this section highlight conceptualizations that are inclusive, broader, and more accurate than those typically used and understood in Minnesota schools and communities. Vocabulary and language are very important; shifts in vocabulary are essential to creating equity-based ecosystems of learning.

## Describe and name the components of community/communities rather than simply use the term *community*.

- There are fewer neighborhood schools, so community is a different thing for different learners. There could be a school community, a neighborhood community, a faith community, etc., that may or may not overlap.
- Recognize and honor overlapping and disconnected ecosystems of communities.
  - Understanding what and where ecosystems are (making these visible).
  - All communities do not need to overlap but should be honored.
  - What communities are privileged or underprivileged?
  - Include faith-based spaces in communities.
  - Include informal out-of-school-time learning spaces, such as libraries.
  - Identify what components of community drive rigid school schedules. For instance, why are AP tests held during Ramadan? What strategies can be used to avoid conflicts such as this? Why are Christian holidays

driving holidays/days off of school for many schools? Many daycare centers choose to simply eliminate holidays. How might this approach work in elementary, middle, and high schools?

**Consider using the term *caregiver* instead of parent.**

- Many youth have one caregiver, multiple caregivers and/or have caregivers who are not their parents.
- Caregiver is inclusive of biological parents, legal guardians, grandparents, siblings, neighbors, etc.

**Expand conceptualizations of family.**

- Family should be an inclusive term that can include immediate family, extended family, chosen family, and kin.

**Use the term *learner* instead of *student*.**

- The term student typically refers to a young person in school and excludes or overshadows the learning youth do in community spaces. Learner is a term that is more broad and inclusive.
- Learner also identifies youth the way we want them to see themselves – as active learners. (See [Student Voice](#).)

**Expand conceptualizations of involvement.**

- Involvement is different in different communities. The ways families and caregivers are involved in learners' education varies.
- For example, involvement can look like a family that has internet access inviting others to use it in their home.

Redefine family engagement and expand the ways that families can engage with school. Engagement does not always require showing up at school or being part of PTO/A. It can mean supporting your learner in showing up to school ready to learn, getting them connected to tutors or mentors, registering learners for summer workshops, which are some examples of the invisible work that happens in support of learning.

## **Frameworks and Principles**

There are two frameworks that we draw on to support our ideas and recommendations for the community bridges strategy: connected learning (Ito et al., 2013) and conceptualization of parent involvement (Weihua & Williams, 2010). Both of these frameworks are grounded in the idea that learning is ecological – not simply cognitive in nature but equally social and cultural. Taking this sort of approach to learning recognizes the many systems with which young people are engaged and provides space to consider the ways in which these systems intersect and bidirectionally influence each other. For example, learning happens not just in school, but also at home, in faith-based organizations, in sports, and other out-of-school-time learning opportunities. The social and emotional skills learners develop in out-of-school-time impact their readiness to learn in school, and what happens in school impacts how youth engage with family and faith and other activities.

**Connected Learning.** Researchers argue that meaningful learning is embedded in relationships, practices, and cultures. Connected learning is a framework for understanding and supporting learning that emphasizes meaningful practices and supportive connections with others. The framework is comprised of principles for learning and design principles.

**Principles for Learning:**

- peer-supported
- interest-powered
- academically-oriented

### Design Principles:

- shared purpose
- openly networked
- production-centered

“Connected learning is realized when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success or civic engagement” (Ito et al., 2013). (See [Student Voice](#) and [Personalized Learning](#).)

At its core, the connected learning framework envisions learning that is ecological and networked in nature. The goal of connected learning is to build communities that nurture learners across multiple learning contexts and pathways.

Schools, homes, after school clubs, religious institutions, and community centers and the parents, teachers, friends, mentors and coaches that young people find at these diverse locales, all potentially have a role to play in guiding young people to connected learning. Connected learning takes root when young people find peers who share interests, when academic institutions recognize and make interest-driven learning relevant to school, and when community institutions provide resources and safe spaces for more peer-driven forms of learning. (Ito et al., p. 8)

All learning does not need to be connected. Not all learning across contexts is connected, nor is it connected all of the time. However, opportunities for connections and communications that contribute to an ecosystem of support are important factors in increasing learners’ social capital. Importantly, connected learning is equity driven so that all learners have opportunities, and so that learning is recognized, valued, and supported across the multiple contexts learners inhabit.

**Parent Involvement.** When students know that their parents are invested in their educational experiences, they understand the importance of education and the expectations their parents have for them (Weihua & Williams, 2010). (See [Student Voice](#).) When parents are engaged in students’ academic experiences they are more likely to know what is being taught in students’ classes and can find ways to support their learning at home. As the significance of parent involvement becomes more evident school leaders, teachers, and policymakers are exploring ways to expand parent involvement. There is a motivation to move beyond traditional approaches such as parent-teacher conferences to more dynamic, engaging approaches where parent knowledge is valued and leveraged to create culturally responsive education experiences.

The flexibility and accessibility of new technologies allow students and parents to participate in engaging activities such as photographing or video recording events and phenomena in out of school contexts that illustrate ideas from classroom instruction. In this digital age, technology can allow parents who may not be typically involved in education to engage in a range of activities that can enhance their children’s educational experiences. Technology can expand parent involvement from unidirectional, school-based experiences to community-building experiences that encourage parents to be engaged with and initiate engagement with their children, family members, and other families in their school community, around academics and in-school learning.

In addition, rather than all approaches being school driven, families can be the initiators of engagement. When encouraged and not restricted by school rules (e.g., school buildings are only open certain hours), families can create community and virtual spaces for dialogue and support for learning. Families have tremendous expertise both in understanding their children, and also understanding what has worked and what has not worked for their family in partnership with schools. Asking families to share that expertise with schools and with each other is an invaluable yet underutilized resource.

## Implications and Recommendations for Practice

**Meet community where they are at (also addressed in the section on [Student Voice](#)).**

- Recognize and visit the many places that youth are learning to expand the contexts and locations in which they can be engaged. This builds community bridges.
- Do not simply bring community into the school. Flip it – decenter school and have school go into community spaces. This is a key factor in nurturing and sustaining relationship building across community bridges and contexts.
  - Go to basketball courts, community centers, libraries, and the many spaces that are welcoming for families and youth.

**Foster, nurture, create and engage in conversations and decisions across communities.**

- Focus on sharing and presenting rather than information dumping.
- Design family involvement days that are NOT connected to gender, race, or ethnicity.
  - Vocabulary and conceptualizations are important. Do not do *muffins with moms*, father/daughter dances, African American Parent Involvement Day, Grandparents Day.

**Create multiple ways to support parent involvement in students' academic experiences (also see [Student Voice](#)).**

- Assume that parents/families have created a supportive home environment for their children that supports academics in the ways that work best in their lives.
- Create opportunities for parents to learn about the instructional goals of the classroom, and opportunities for them to share how they support their children's learning at home.
- Consider ways that students' education experiences can intersect with their everyday, lived experiences.
- Engage in meaningful discourse with parents in formal (parent teacher conference, school events) and informal (brief conversations before and after the school day) contexts.
- Consider technology as a bridge rather than a barrier. o Create and support networks that connect parents/families into school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives including advisory councils, committees, and communities for parent participation, and conversation.
- Collaborate with independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.
- Create networks that link all families with parent representatives.

Use the universal design for learning (UDL) framework in tandem with culturally sustaining pedagogies to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities (Waitholler & King Thorius, 2016).

**Invite, involve, and authentically engage youth in building community bridges.**

- Use the YPAR approach to positive youth and community development in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them.
  - YPAR not only provides a structure for examining adult beliefs in school and community and investigating issues, but it importantly locates young people as agents of change in their communities. (See [Student Voice](#).)

**Invest in afterschool programs, activities, and transportation. These are vital to maintaining community bridges.**

- These items are typically the first things that are cut in budget crises; resist financial cuts to these areas.

### Create multiple pathways and formats for communication and connected learning.

- Utilize technology in support of communicating, sharing, showcasing, collaborating, and learning; technology is an essential component to networked community bridges.
- Communicate in all languages present in the community.
- Use multiple formats and channels for communication including paper, text, webpages, email, and mail.
- Communicate the same messages to ALL (families, learners, counselors, educators) about how to find information in addition to the message content and purpose.
- Recognize, honor, and make visible bridges/connections between multiple learning spaces, and the learning that happens in them.

Provide ongoing professional learning and ongoing support related to connected learning (connected teaching) becoming part of standard practice in schools.

### Resources for Practitioners

Berkowitz, R., Moore, H., Astor, R. A., & Benbenishty, R. (2017).

A research synthesis of the associations between socioeconomic background, inequality, school climate, and academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(2), 425-469.

Connected Learning in Teaching Practice Resources

[https://clalliance.org/connected-learning-in-teaching-practice/?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=CLA&utm\\_source=twitter.com](https://clalliance.org/connected-learning-in-teaching-practice/?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=CLA&utm_source=twitter.com)

Connected Learning: A Field-Tested Resource for Practitioners.

<https://resources.chicagolx.org/clguide/clx-connected-learning-guide-expanded-4-17-19.pdf>

Epstein, J. L. (2011).

*School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: Westview Press.

Garcia, M. E., Frunzi, K., Dean, C. B., Flores, N., & Miller, K. B. (2016).

*Toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education: Part 4: Engaging all in data conversations* (REL 2016–153). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>

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Lawson, M. A. (2003).

School-family relations in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education*, 38(1), 77-133.

Minnesota Department of Education. (2015).

*Engaging Asian families for student success*. <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/part/>



Pavlaklis, A. E. (2018).

Reaching all families: Family, school, and community partnerships amid homelessness and high mobility in an urban district. *Urban Education*, 53(8), 1043-1073.

Reschly, A. L., & Christenson, S. L. (2012).

Moving from “Context Matters” to engaged partnerships with families. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 22(1-2), 62-78.

Research on the factors for school success: University of Minnesota Extension.

<https://extension.umn.edu/research/research-factors-school-success>

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the empirical support for the six factors that emerged from a comprehensive literature review of the effect of family, school, and community influences on children’s learning.

Transitioning from conventional to connected teaching: Small moves and radical acts.

<https://thecurrent.educatorinnovator.org/collection/transitioning-from-conventional-to-connected-teaching-small-moves-and-radical-acts>

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and guidelines.

<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

YPAR Hub (Youth-Led Participatory Action Research)

<http://yparhub.berkeley.edu>

Youthprise (Minneapolis MN) YPAR Grant Opportunities and Resources

<https://youthprise.org/funding/grants/ypar-grants/>

# Recruitment and Retention

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## Overview

The current state of teacher of color retention and recruitment is a state emergency. According to the *2019 Biennial Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand* report (Wilder Research, 2019), during the 2017-2018 school year, although the percentage of students of color was 33.5%, the percentage of teachers of color was only 4.3%. About 90% of schools in the state of Minnesota report having difficulty in recruiting teachers of color (Wilder Research, 2019). Researchers indicate that having more teachers of color improves the academic outcomes of students of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). To meet the needs of all students, we must reimagine existing efforts and support strategic and systematic ways of recruiting and retaining teachers of color.

According to the 2018 Reimagine report, three specific areas should be addressed: (a) Structure and support robust pathways and strategies to increase staff of color; (b) institute holistic strategies/systems for diverse teacher development, recruiting, hiring and retention; and (c) build systemic strategies for recruiting and retaining staff of color. In addition, teacher education programs and educational systems must value the intersectionality of identities that teachers of color possess. Teachers of color see, experience, and participate in the world in ways that must be valued. Valuing their experiences in the world is the basis on which, “to frame a just and democratic ideology for the recruitment and preparation of teachers of color” (Dillard, 1994, p. 9). Given this frame presented by Dillard (1994), we must first acknowledge what is gained by schools as a result of having teachers of color.

## What Schools and Students Gain By Having Teachers of Color

There are at least three major arguments for diversifying the teaching force (Villegas & Irvine, 2010): (a) Teachers of color serve as important role models for students; (b) when students of color have teachers of color, they have better academic outcomes and schooling experiences; and (c) teachers of color are more likely to serve and be retained in difficult-to-staff schools.

- **Teachers of Color as Mentors.** Although the argument for role models within the teaching field is “compelling” (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 178), there is limited empirical evidence that teachers of color as role models directly impact student outcomes. However, Vanessa Siddle Walker (2000) found that during segregation, Black teachers were known for high student achievement, being dedicated to their students, and ultimately having high expectations for their students. “Black teachers, similar to all teachers, are texts themselves, but these teachers’ text pages are inundated with life experiences and histories of racism, sexism, and oppression, along with those of strength, perseverance, and success” (Milner, 2006, p. 92). There is something to be said about teachers who have experiences that inform their practice and relationships with students.
- **Improved Academic Outcomes.** Villegas and Irvine (2010) illuminated that when compared to White teachers, teachers of color held more favorable views of their students of color—including views of students’ academic potential. This resulted in students of color performing better in their coursework and on other academic outcomes. Key features from the studies reviewed include, but are not limited to:
  - Teachers of color use insider knowledge on culture, language, and lived experiences to meet academic, social, and emotional needs of students (culturally relevant teaching).
  - Students performed better academically when the demographics of the teaching staff closely mirrored the demographics of the student population.
  - There was a lower dropout rate as well as a higher rate of college matriculation when there were more

teachers of color in a school.

- Teachers of color had high expectations of students, actively countered racism in their teaching, and served as advocates.
- **Stronger Teacher Workforce.** Villegas and Irvine (2010) found that with a growing enrollment of students of color, teachers of color had higher retention rates than White teachers. This was found to be regardless of income—with high numbers of Black and brown students, White teachers were not retained, whereas teachers of color were more likely to remain. The “evidence suggests that compared to White teachers, educators of color appear to be more committed to teaching students of color, more drawn to teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, and more apt to persist in those settings” (p. 186).

## Historical Context

We must also consider how we got here. Too often, conversations on the recruitment and retention of teachers of color ignore that the teaching force has not always been so predominantly White. The U.S. once had a booming Black educator community. In fact, educators largely comprised the Black middle-class prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Recently, the *Journal of Teacher Education* dedicated an issue to this very topic. Carter et al. (2019) argued that policies historically and presently play critical roles in the state of education. A lesser-discussed consequence of *Brown v. Board* was its long-term effects on the demographics of the teaching force. As cited by Carter et al. (2019), 38,000 African American teachers in southern and border states lost their jobs within 10 years of the Brown ruling due to White people’s refusal to allow their children to be taught by Black teachers (Oakley, Stowell, & Logan, 2009). Principals were also forced out of their jobs—which largely resulted in the destruction of the Black middle class of that time. Essentially, Blacks were forced out of the field of education. So, the challenge is not simply recruiting African-Americans into the field, it is more so: *How do we convince Black teachers [including indigenous and other communities of color] to return to the field of education as teachers?*

## Current State of Recruitment and Retention

Various and significant barriers hinder efforts to recruit teachers of color to the field of education. These barriers include limited high school student interest in the teaching profession, teacher licensure exams, and insufficient supports (e.g., mentorships, advising, finances). Each of these barriers is linked to other structural barriers, which we discuss below.

- **High school interest.** According to Gist, Bianco, and Lynn (2019), in a report from ACT, just 4% of high school students were interested in pursuing the teaching profession; 70% of those students were White. Teachers of color have been found to not perform as well as their White counterparts on college entrance tests. Therefore, there are limitations on students interested in the field of education.
- **Teacher licensure exams.** It has been found that 62% of Black candidates, 43% of Latino candidates do not pass the standard licensure exam (Putman & Walsh, 2019). According to Petchauer (2019), of 16,900 aspiring teachers of color, 8,600 do not pass. This is a rate of exclusion 27.5% higher for aspiring teachers of color than for White aspiring teachers. The test may currently serve as a gatekeeper to the very students we want to recruit to the field. Related, the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), currently a licensure requirement for Minnesota teachers, has been cited as particularly vulnerable for cultural and linguistic bias against teachers of color, while also reinforcing concerning messages about the possibility of a standardized teaching field (Madeloni, 2015; Petchauer, Bowe, & Wilson, 2018).
- **Supports.** According to the Center for American Progress (Bireda & Chait, 2011), the programs most successful at recruiting teachers of color invest sufficient funds and time. These programs spend time and resources and specifically target the needs of their students.

Recommendations from the Center for American Progress for recruitment of teachers include:

- Design accountability processes for teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers of color.
- Develop statewide initiatives to fund teacher preparation programs for low-income teachers and teachers of color.
- Improve the federal aid program for low-income students entering the teaching field.
- Create additional options to enter the field of education.
- Strengthen state-sponsored and nonprofit recruitment and training programs that have well-established relationships with districts.

Although these recommendations are important, teacher education program design is central to recruitment and retention challenges. There is a great need for resources to re-envision the teacher education process and structure. As is widely understood, teacher preparation programs have been largely designed to meet the needs of the White women who currently make up the vast majority of preservice teachers (Gay, 2010). Programs must invest in designing and enacting curriculum and pedagogy that neither assumes Whiteness nor excuses practices that are known to perpetuate racist outcomes. All teachers must come to an understanding that the institution of schooling is structurally inequitable. Educator preparation, recruitment, and retention efforts must understand that teachers of color possess incredible resources and are not ready-made as critical conscious educators; all new teachers need support (Morales, 2019).

According to the *2019 Biennial Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report* (Wilder Research, 2019), typical recruitment efforts for teachers are generally not successful for teachers of color. However, pipeline programs (see Table 1 below) often made a difference in the recruitment of teachers of color. Other districts described success by employing intentional recruitment, having diversity goals, communicating a commitment to racial equity, and partnering with local programs serving American Indian communities. Establishing meaningful partnerships among school districts and licensure-granting institutions is key.

**Table 1**

*Minnesota School District Efforts to Recruit Teachers of Color*

	<b>n</b>	<b>Made no difference</b>	<b>Made slight difference</b>	<b>Made some difference</b>	<b>Mad a very big difference</b>
<b>Provide hiring incentives</b>	58	69%	12%	16%	3%
<b>Provide a competitive salary</b>	236	59%	14%	23%	3%
<b>Create a pipeline program (e.g., residency models, Grow Your Own)</b>	110	50%	23%	18%	9%
<b>Offer position postings beyond where districts usually post</b>	210	59%	20%	19%	3%

Source: Wilder Research, 2019.

Teacher preparation programs have reported providing alternative modes of instruction like online options so that their programs are more accessible. Teachers of color were also found to benefit from individualized support through advising. However, according to the Wilder Research (2019) report, there was a low response rate from teacher preparation programs concerning their recruitment strategies. Therefore, there is much needed work in this area. The report did not discuss retention in teacher preparation programs.

The Wilder Research report summarized district efforts regarding retention of teachers of color with mixed results (see Table 2). It is increasingly challenging for schools to retain teachers of color, especially men (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Turnover of teachers of color is tightly linked in some states to teacher accountability efforts. Such efforts have led to less teacher autonomy and difficult work environments (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Even when retention is successful, the toll on teachers of color is damaging and must be addressed regarding the workplace environment and ongoing supports (Bristol & Goings, 2019).

**Table 2**

*Minnesota School District Efforts to Retain Teachers of Color*

	<b>n</b>	<b>Made no difference</b>	<b>Made slight difference</b>	<b>Made some difference</b>	<b>Made a very big difference</b>
<b>Provide mentorship programs</b>	238	48%	16%	27%	9%
<b>Provide professional development opportunities</b>	262	46%	16%	30%	8%
<b>Offer promotions or increase salaries</b>	172	52%	18%	24%	6%
<b>Offer teacher-on-special-assignment opportunities</b>	154	69%	11%	18%	2%

*Source: Wilder Research, 2019.*

### **Addressing Barriers: A Vision for Minnesota's Future**

Given the breadth and depth of historical and contemporary analyses of the problem, it is clear that recruiting and retaining Black teachers, Indigenous teachers, and teachers of color is a complex and multilayered task. Indeed, it should be understood as perhaps *the* central task of education in the coming decades. And even as we may understand the tactical barriers to building a robust and diverse corps of teachers in Minnesota, the education field also faces structural barriers to carrying out what we know to be right and good. Thus, we recommend an action plan that begins with statewide structures.

1. At present, the most organized efforts to diversify Minnesota's teacher workforce are led by The Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota (<https://www.tocaimn.com/>). Minnesota's entire education community must build on these grassroots efforts. First, we must increase organization and sustainability by creating a **state-level legislative advocacy group** that partners with school districts (school boards, district leadership, teachers, and communities) and higher education to seek, maintain, and communicate widely about adequate funding sources for recruitment and retention efforts. Rather than being an ad-hoc group organized alongside existing appointments at their institutions, these roles

should be significant state-level leadership positions. The experiences and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and people of color must be at the center of these efforts. White leaders should work to become accomplices (Mason, 2019).

2. Partnerships among school districts, institutions of higher education, and state organizations must be organized and intentional. Where funding and resources can be shared, leaders should do so willingly. Efforts such as Reimagine MN provide invaluable models of the importance of **reducing competition** for the sake of Minnesota children. Higher education funding models and other aspects of a neoliberal market logic make competition a reality and a barrier for genuine transformation of the teacher workforce. When all entities build common understanding and investment in recruitment and retention of teachers of color, we will be better positioned to make significant changes with ripple effects across the state.
3. Partnerships must also include **significant investment in induction**, which can and should be a joint effort between school districts and institutions of higher education. An investment in induction includes financial support for personnel and ongoing research. We know that without deep and ongoing induction, the shaping powers of teacher preparation are weak. When teacher education faculty are able to maintain mentoring relationships with new teachers, the benefits are mutual and widespread. Although induction supports provide benefits for the entire school, they can be critical for teachers of color who are navigating microaggressions, overt racism, and other challenges of working in predominantly White spaces. Induction is thus a key aspect of retention. It also enhances efforts toward deepening partnerships and sharing resources to reduce competition toward the shared goal of a strong, diverse teaching force.

## Resources for Practitioners

The Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota

<https://www.tocaimn.com/>

Minnesota Grow Your Own Teachers Program (MNGOT)

<https://www.cehd.umn.edu/teaching/grow/>

Resources from the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership

<https://mneep.org/category/blog/?teachers-of-color>

Report from the Center for American Progress

Bireda, S., & Chait, R. (2011). *Increasing teacher diversity: Strategies to improve the teacher workforce*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535654.pdf>

Report from the National Council on Teacher Quality

Putman, H., & Walsh, K. (2019). *A fair chance: Simple steps to strengthen and diversity the teacher workforce*. National Council on Teacher Quality. <https://www.nctq.org/publications/a-fair-chance>



# School Finance

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## Overview

Equity is a multifaceted ideal. The essence of equity is the distribution of resources in terms of benefits received or costs incurred. This discussion focuses on the distribution of benefits and its implications for students rather than on the distribution of costs and its implications for taxpayers. Thus, this discussion addresses the creation of an equitable school finance system in the distribution of valued resources not on how policymakers raised funds to pay for them.

Assessments of school finance equity depend on the resources examined (e.g., dollars, time spent on advance curricula; teachers), the population analyzed (e.g., districts, schools, classrooms), and what is valued in the educational experience. Equitable distributions based on one set of criteria do not necessarily translate into equitable distributions based on other standards. For example, it is possible for per-pupil funding among districts to be relatively even and still have an inequitable system in the distribution of experienced teachers. A state may have equitable distributions of experienced teachers among districts with inequitable distributions of teachers among schools within those districts. An important part of this discussion in the wake of the Cruz-Guzmán case is to consider whether racial or economic diversity is an end sine qua non or a means by which educators realize other goals. If the former, then it is important to examine the distribution of diversity as one would with any other valuable resource.

All state constitutions speak to equity explicitly or implicitly in their educational clause. For Minnesota, the educational clause requires the legislature to “make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state.” The Constitution requires the result of that funding to be a “general and uniform system of public schools” (Minnesota Constitution, Article XIII, Section 1). There is disagreement, however, on what that ideal system looks like in reality and the appropriate funding mechanisms by which policymakers can realize that ideal.

This discussion on school finance seeks to complement Minnesota’s constitutional charge and the action strategies offered in the *Reimagine Minnesota* report by laying out important ideas in school finance. We present a broad overview of important constructs and focus on two salient ideas: (a) What is the role of the state in educational funding and (b) how can we assess if the funding system is fair.

The discussion includes three sections. First, we examine the different funding philosophies that undergird school finance decisions, the perceived role of the state, and the implications of each of these leading perspectives. Second, we examine the various goals or standards of fairness used to assess the equity of funding distribution. Third, we close with general remarks regarding the relevance of these concepts for providing equitable educational opportunities for students. Whereas these ideas speak directly to how state policymakers can create equitable funding systems, parallel considerations exist for local educators in their decisions on how to allocate the educational resources they receive from the state.

## Funding Philosophies and the Role of the State

The decision on how to fund schools primarily rests with state policymakers. The results of these decisions reflect constitutional directives and community values. Policymakers have three major ways in which they view the primary role of the state:

1. need based, where the primary role of the state is to address the educational needs of students and the capacity of the district to meet those needs;
2. output based, where the primary role of the state is to incentivize output; and
3. effort based, where the primary role of the state is to reward district fiscal effort.

Within districts and schools, education leaders also have to prioritize how they should allocate their resources to create equitable educational opportunities for all students. Whereas state policymakers consider resource distribution among districts, district leaders consider resource distribution among schools, principals consider distribution among classrooms, and teachers consider distribution among students within their class. Analogous decisions regarding distribution occurs at all levels; the discussion below focuses on the state, but the essence of the argument applies to district leaders and other educators as well.

### Addressing Disparate Need

At the state level, need-based aid focuses on addressing the varying fiscal needs of school districts. The seminal work by Berne and Steifel (1984) and the more recent treatise by Odden and Picus (2013) undergird much of school finance scholarship focused on equity. Researchers have argued that to create equal opportunities for students, the state should address differences among districts that are outside district control. These external factors include the needs of the students served by the district; the **ability of the local communities to raise their own money**; and the **structural** costs inherent to particular districts.

**Student needs.** States typically consider that students who are in poverty, who are English learners, or individuals with disabilities will require more support to be academically successful than students who do not face these challenges. Minnesota's school finance system allocates additional funding based on the numbers and concentrations of students in a district who are eligible for subsidized federal lunches (a measure of poverty), English learners, or students with disabilities. See, for example, Minnesota House of Representatives Fiscal Analysis Department, 2019, pp. 4, 37-40).

By contrast, many finance scholars have shied away from identifying race as a legitimate factor in the allocation of educational resources. One worry is that to appropriate funds based on race may result in a deficit framework, where children of color are considered to need more resources because they are viewed as less than. However, as Alexander and Jang (2019) noted, the need for explicitly acknowledging race in education funding models comes from the history of overt actions on the part of state and federal policymakers to provide greater resources to White communities. This *de jure* discrimination has left a legacy of resource inequities long after policymakers have officially removed racially discriminatory laws from the books (Rothstein, 2017).

Freeman (2017) also noted the damaging impacts of stereotype threats on many aspects of the lives of Black persons, all of which affect their opportunities for academic success. These impacts go beyond those felt by their White peers even when White students have similar social backgrounds and incomes. In his study of student achievement gaps in the U.S., Yeh (2017) noted, "there is something about the interaction between Black students and schools that interfere with the learning process" (p. 3). (See [Cultural Competence](#).) These collective impacts influence the funding needs of the districts that serve relatively high portions of Black students. Furthermore, Levy et al. (2016) observed that race plays a role beyond poverty status in shaping student opportunity. With the enactment of Achievement and Integration Aid, there is some attempt on the part of Minnesota's funding system to acknowledge the role of race in the educational experience of students. These efforts, nevertheless, have often been on a more ad hoc basis than the funding streams provided to address poverty, language proficiency, and disability (e.g., Minnesota House of Representatives, Fiscal Analysis Department, 2019, p. 53).

**District capacity.** Policymakers also provide aid to address the variation in the capacity of districts to pay for educational programs. The ability of districts to provide educational opportunities for their students vary with the types and value of the properties within their jurisdiction. Opportunities may be constrained both from a district's ability to raise its own revenue as well as the disparate district cost structures associated with educating students. Minnesota addresses dissimilarities in revenue raising among districts as well as differential cost structures through the equalization of certain state aid and the provision of revenue streams determined by diseconomies of scale due to low population density. These are appropriate considerations in the allocation of state educational dollars. However,

unavoidably higher costs are not only associated with the diseconomies of scale found in smaller schools, but also in the higher costs faced by schools located in regions with higher prices. Alexander, Holquist, and Kim (2018), for example, found that Minneapolis would have had to spend \$10.5 million more in 2013-2014 to have the same level of services as a Minnesota district with average costs.

Thus, although Minnesota policymakers have provisions to address additional costs for districts with high student need, these efforts are somewhat muted because metropolitan schools are often located in markets that also have relatively high labor costs. City and suburban districts incur higher educational outlays not only because of student demographics but also because the cost of providing education programs are higher in these communities than for districts in lower-cost markets. That is, a district's ability to provide educational opportunities is not only influenced by the dollars it can raise (fiscal capacity), but also by what those dollars can buy (purchasing power). By equalizing nominal dollars rather than purchasing power, policymakers may miss a key source of opportunity gaps among students.

Alexander et al. (2018) suggest several reasons that policymakers may hesitate to equalize purchasing power based on geographic location. First, to the extent that the disparities identified do not appropriately reflect costs outside the control of school leaders, the adjustments would not only reflect geographic cost disparities, but local leadership choices. Further, if the district is the dominant employer in the labor market, the amount paid to their faculty and staff could influence the wages in the region. Another related concern voiced by policymakers centers on striking the appropriate balance in determining the influence of local and regional labor costs on the unavoidable costs of the district.

Another challenge with providing more funding based on higher geographic costs is that it may unfairly advantage already wealthy districts. These concerns are misplaced in the Minnesotan context. Minnesota school districts located in high-price markets tended to have lower per-pupil fiscal capacity than districts with lower regional costs (e.g., Alexander et al., 2019). Moreover, when those districts were also located in urban communities, they tended to serve higher proportions of students eligible for lunch subsidies. This finding is especially troubling because it means that these higher-cost urban districts not only had to stretch their nominal dollars farther than average-cost districts, they also had to do so while serving more students placed at risk.

### **Incentivizing Output**

There is consensus that addressing different student needs and district capacities is essential for the creation of an equitable education funding system. More controversial is the push to have funding tied to outputs produced by units within the educational system. In Minnesota and across the U.S., the importance of teachers to school reform is well documented. Some policymakers argue that if they provide appropriate incentives to teachers, the educational opportunities within the system would increase.

Darling-Hammond (2015) has argued that funding a model that assumed links among policy, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement is problematic. She noted that for value-added assessment models to work, three conditions would have to hold.

1. First, the tests on which they rely would have to capture student learning accurately along a vertical scale representing the full range of possible achievement measured in equal interval units. Darling-Hammond observed, however, that statewide tests are often narrow in scope and focus on lower levels of skills.
2. Second, students would have to be assigned randomly to teachers within and across schools. The concentration of poverty in certain schools and neighborhoods combined with the tracking of poor and non-White children in less rigorous classes invalidate that assumption.
3. Third, individual teachers would have to be the only contributors to students' learning over the period used to measure gains in student achievement. However, there is unanimous agreement that other factors also play a role in student achievement, including other teachers, non-classroom schooling factors, family and community factors, and policy.

Gilles (2015) has suggested that formative evaluation efforts typically rely less on student scores than on classroom observation. Ladd (2012) has advocated improving student scores through the use of stronger administrative supports rather than high-stakes teacher assessment models. Odden and Kelly (2002) have called for career ladders that allow teachers to pursue in-depth professional development. Jacob (2007), however, has noted that there is little empirical evidence that supports the effectiveness of these administrative programs in improving teacher retention and, by extension, student performance.

Minnesota has implemented a modified version of incentivizing outputs in its alternative teacher compensation revenue program (Q-Comp) (<http://www.house.mn/fiscal/home/issuebriefs>, p. 42). The broad nature of this alternative compensation strategy distinguishes it from a more narrowly defined teacher evaluation model relying on measuring gains in student test scores.

### **Rewarding Fiscal Effort**

Districts have different fiscal capacity; they may also prioritize spending on education differently. Fiscal effort refers to the willingness of policymakers to access their available fiscal resources in the provision of educational programs. However, fiscal effort is bounded by fiscal capacity. Without the state intervening, districts with equal fiscal effort but different fiscal capacities would have different levels of resources available to fund educational programs. Consequently, districts with lower property values may tax themselves at high rates and still have lower yields than wealthier districts that tax themselves at the same or even lower rates. Many policymakers argue that the role of the state is to ensure that similar financial effort should yield similar financial results. Although these equalization efforts can help to reduce the role of district wealth in district spending, they do not address spending differences tied to local choice rather than capacity. Minnesota equalizes several portions of a district's educational budget, including operating capital revenue, equity revenue, and referendum revenue. The latter two streams attempt not only to address differences in capacity but also differences in the willingness of community to support additional taxes. Combined, these efforts seek to reduce the disparity in educational programming among districts and the students they serve.

### **Goals of Fairness in Distribution of Educational Resources**

School finance scholars shape school finance systems with four primary goals: (a) **horizontal equity**, (b) **vertical equity**, (c) **fiscal neutrality**, and (d) **adequacy**. Horizontal equity is the criterion that calls for the system to treat equally situated entities equally (e.g., all third graders get the same funding levels). Vertical equity requires that the educational system treat differently situated entities differently (e.g., third graders who are poor get more resources than third graders who are not). Fiscal neutrality requires a system that weakens or eliminates the link between geography and spending levels. Adequacy requires that lawmakers invest sufficient resources so that most students achieve high standards.

These equity goals are ambiguous, so education stakeholders need to determine how to transform these ideals into concrete educational opportunities for all children. That transformation requires a collective conversation on the part of key stakeholders, much like the conversations held in the Reimagine Minnesota process. Key questions would have to include, what are the boundaries surrounding equally situated. What are the appropriate constraints and boundaries to consider? Is educational context bounded by grade level, (e.g., all third graders are treated equally), or is it more qualified (all third graders in a particular school)? Given the uniqueness of each child, there are certainly limits to universal edicts, but given the constraints of collective governance, there also needs to be consistency. A good rule of thumb is that educators should treat students equally unless educators can articulate a legitimate rationale grounded in evidence for differential treatment.

Minnesota has fulfilled aspects of all the above-mentioned criteria in its school finance system. For example, the relatively high levels of basic aid in the general education revenue allocated to all public school students in the state reflect horizontal equity, and more debatably, adequacy. The differences in the calculated supplemental aid based on

poverty, language proficiency, and district sparsity are examples of efforts to achieve vertical equity. The equalization efforts are strategies that help the state to achieve fiscal neutrality.

In re-evaluating and restructuring statewide school funding, we propose that results neutrality serve as an additional criterion by which stakeholders can assess the equity of the school finance system. **Results neutrality** requires that there be sufficient appropriations and appropriate allocative decisions so that we are unable to predict how well a child performs based on his/her race, poverty status, or zip code. This criterion not only requires state policy makers to make sufficiently high investments in the system, but also relies on local educational leaders to make spending decisions that reduce the links among race, poverty, and student achievement. Investing in pedagogical and organizational strategies that improve the achievement of students placed at risk is essential to that effort.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Minnesota has provisions to address additional costs for districts with high student need, such as poverty, but these efforts are somewhat muted in metropolitan schools because of relatively high labor costs. Thus, urban and suburban districts incur higher educational outlays not only because of student demographics but also because the cost of providing education programs is higher in these communities than for districts in lower-cost markets. As part of reimagining Minnesota's school finance system, education leaders will have to reflect on what values are intrinsic to providing equitable opportunities to students. Part of that reflection includes frank considerations about how the education community should view integration and if the distribution of race is in itself a measure of educational opportunities.

# A Role for Social & Emotional Learning

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## *Part One: Social and Emotional Learning*

### **Background**

An area that adds value to the Reimagine report is to provide a parallel for cultural competence by adding social and emotional competence for both youth and adults. Reimagine Minnesota focuses on systems changes, and we recognize that effective systems involve individuals who have strong interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and competencies. Without those skills it is difficult to develop shared understandings and positive cultural interactions that increase competence and sense of community, to engage and respect diverse voices of students and communities that create pathways for all to succeed, and to make schools more inclusive.

Here, we introduce a new section that recognizes the importance of developing inter- and intrapersonal skills, not only for students, but also for the entire community of life-long learners. This section explains the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL), frames it within broader research literatures, and links it to parallel work on resilience that has proven to be important in shaping systems that promote educational successes.

Part One addresses the promise of SEL and introduces the initiative underway through the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Part Two addresses the additional challenges in the context of resilience and other persistent challenges that may be addressed through a focus on SEL with attention to the power of resilience. SEL competencies can be measured at the individual level, but such measures are indicators of the effectiveness of school and community practices and policies (of systems). Each section of this report embodies arenas where SEL is at play and how SEL provides us with information about how those arenas are functioning.

### **A Cautionary Note**

SEL aims to enhance student outcomes through helping students develop and enhance inter- and intra-personal skills and processes such as cooperating with others and managing and regulating one's own emotions. SEL includes the development of a positive sense of self and understanding of how one's sense of self is shaped and influenced by others. However, we acknowledge that the promise of SEL is easily reversed through schools with practices and policies that result in unfair disparities in rewards and punishments, access to high-quality curricular and co-curricular activities, and relationships with teachers, staff, and school leaders.

As communities continue to diversify, school staff do not reflect the backgrounds of their students—and in those cases, staff do not understand the lived experiences of their students or integrate such understanding in their work. It is critical to acknowledge that some may use the principles of SEL to protect and defend their own implicit biases, further requiring students of color to compromise their sense of self and community. SEL could easily become a weapon to maintain and enhance the inequities in school practices and policies, providing yet another reason for excluding students.

In these respects, attention to SEL is a system-wide effort, as described below in the goals of MDE. All individuals in the system, youth and adults, benefit from attention to their SEL competencies, particularly in settings addressing equity system wide. There are many approaches to defining SEL and frameworks that identify relevant competencies and skills. Here, we focus on the CASEL framework, since MDE has based their SEL guidance for schools on this framework.



## What is SEL?

SEL is a family of evidence-based practices and assessments that answers this call. SEL refers to a type of educational intervention targeting skills, attitudes, and mindsets that are essential to success in contemporary society, that until now have been largely overlooked in traditional public education in the U.S. SEL competencies are linked to greater well-being, whereas the lack of social and emotional competence can lead to challenges in personal, social, and academic contexts (Durlak et al., 2011; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

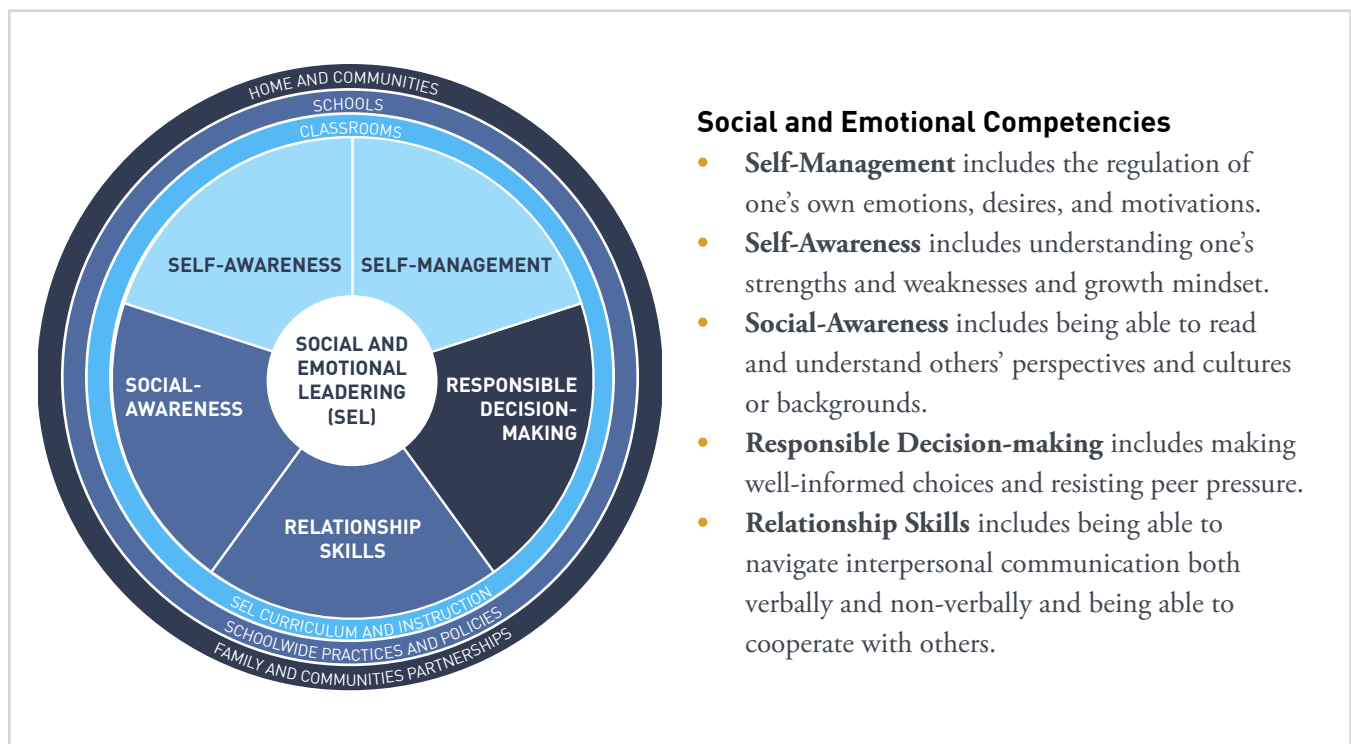
Given the importance of success in social and emotional development, educational systems can better integrate opportunities for all students to develop and enhance their social and emotional competencies.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2019a)

Social and emotional development comprises specific skills and competencies that people need in order to set goals, manage behavior, build relationships, and process and remember information. (The Aspen Institute, 2018)

## Competencies

There are a variety of frameworks describing the types of social and emotional skills and/or competencies at the heart of SEL interventions (see the frameworks summary, CASEL, 2019b). Each of these frameworks indicates that the targeted skills are malleable; students and adults can develop and enhance their SEL skills and competencies. The CASEL framework includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies (CASEL, 2019a).



Source: CASEL, 2019.

MDE has adopted the CASEL (2019a) framework to define the SEL competencies appropriate for MN schools and students in K-12 programs. The five CASEL competencies are broken down into benchmarks and sample activities for grade bands K-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The competency documents also list the MN academic standards associated with each benchmark—illustrating the connections to academic development. MDE also provides implementation and professional development guidance, as well as assessment guidance.

### **SEL Minnesota Style**

MDE has adopted the CASEL (2019a) framework to define the SEL competencies appropriate for MN schools and students in K-12 programs. The five CASEL competencies are broken down into benchmarks and sample activities for grade bands K-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The competency documents also list the MN academic standards associated with each benchmark – illustrating the connections to academic development. This effort is a stark reminder that academic and cognitive development co-occurs with social, cultural, and identity development. They are intertwined (Shepard, Penual, & Pellegrino, 2018).

The MN approach to SEL for schools and districts employs three principles (see the link to the MDE SEL guidance in the resource section):

1. Be intentional and explicit.
2. Engage in SEL activities that are embedded in the everyday practice of teaching and learning.
3. Adopt SEL approaches school or district wide with a focus on the formative uses of SEL information that is also school or district wide.

### **Outcomes**

Current attention to SEL grew out of the need for alternative educational practices that address disparate student outcomes, for researchers throughout the past few decades have focused on cognitive factors in achievement and failed to successfully address existing disparities. Although there are theoretical bases such as Bandura's social learning theory that help inform best practices, SEL is a practical intervention. Despite a somewhat limited theoretical base, evaluation researchers have provided support for the efficacy of SEL programs by demonstrating their positive impact on a variety of student outcomes. It is also clear that the role of SEL and student and school success crosses racial and socio-economic divides (Benson et al., 2006; Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004; Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003)

#### **Social and Emotional Outcomes**

The primary purpose of addressing SEL is to enhance students' social and emotional competencies, which in turn improve academic and social outcomes (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Students build social and emotional competencies through developing and enhancing certain skills, such as perspective taking or conflict resolution, and positive attitudes, such as self-esteem and prosocial beliefs. Through these skills and attitudes, SEL interventions are effective for improving other outcomes as well. SEL skill development has been strongly linked to students' well-being and less emotional distress during follow-ups (Durlak et al., 2011; Tayler et al., 2017). Further, students also build more relationships that are positive with teachers, peers, and families, when engaging in SEL-focused activities. These are clear connections to other strategies identified in Reimagine Minnesota, including amplifying [Student Voice](#) and [Community Bridges](#).

#### **Academic Outcomes**

Even though SEL refers broadly to efforts to help students develop or enhance social and emotional competencies, usually through skills training and/or whole-school climate interventions, SEL is closely tied to and evaluated in terms of its impacts on academic outcomes. Researchers conducting meta-analyses of existing research find that SEL interventions are linked to enhanced academic outcomes, such as higher grades (Durlak et al., 2010; Taylor et al.,

2017). These effects are seen not only immediately following the interventions but also in follow-up studies. SEL also has been linked to higher school attendance and graduation.

From the MN Student Survey, we have evidence (Rodriguez, 2019) that indicates strong positive connections between SEL competencies and higher school grades; these competencies include Commitment to Learning, Positive Identity and Outlook, Social Competence, Empowerment, Family/Community Support, and Teacher/School Support. Moreover, SEL equally predicts school grades for students who identify as American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander, Black, White, Latino, Somali, and Hmong. In addition, students in all groups with higher levels of SEL competencies report higher levels of post-high school aspirations—they are more likely to report aspirations to attend college.

A 28-member council of distinguished scientists endorsed a consensus statement regarding the evidence base for social, emotional, and academic development (Jones & Kahn, 2017). This council endorsed consensus statements of evidence, including assertions such that social, emotional, and cognitive competencies

- are fundamentally intertwined;
- develop throughout life and are essential to success in school, workplace, home, and community;
- can be taught and developed throughout life;
- are influenced by families, schools, communities and their institutions;
- are essential parts of P-12 education, promoting 21st century skills; and
- provide positive social and emotional development that benefits students from all backgrounds.

### **Behavioral Outcomes**

Participation in SEL interventions is associated with reducing occurrences of negative patterns of behavior. Specifically, SEL interventions have been linked to lower behavioral misconduct, such as fewer disruptive class behaviors, lower drug usage, and safer sex practices. SEL program participants also demonstrate more positive social behaviors and prosocial attitudes. SEL interventions such as cooperative learning also have been found to reduce conflicts in school settings by improving students' interaction skills. In some instances, improved conflict resolution and avoidance skills have been reported as carrying over to out of school settings (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007).

Also from the MN Student Survey, we have evidence (Rodriguez, 2019) that indicates strong positive associations between SEL competencies and higher rates of after-school activity participation and healthy behaviors including sleeping at least 8 hours on school nights, eating fruits and vegetables, and exercising regularly. In MN, SEL competencies also are associated with lower levels of engaging in bullying behaviors, mental distress, skipping class or school, school suspensions, and substance use. The Minnesota Youth Development Research Group (see link in the resource section) has explored the MN Student Survey for over a decade to amplify students' own voice and learn from their experiences in MN schools and communities. (See [Student Voice](#).)

### **SEL in Practice**

What makes SEL particularly important for furthering the success of students is that SEL is a universal intervention, meaning that the underlying philosophy is that everyone can benefit from SEL. It is not typically used as remediation or as a pull-out intervention. First, regardless of a person's current skills or competencies, they can always practice and enhance their skills and competencies; SEL does not assume that there is a set level of required competencies beyond which no further skill development is needed. Rather, it employs a more asset-based approach, focused on enhancing skills rather than a deficit approach assuming that certain students lack certain skills and efforts must be undertaken targeting those students. Second, the skills and competencies that SEL helps foster are important for children and adults (such as their teachers and mentors). A large component of SEL is learning from one another, so the focus is on enhancing everyone's understanding of themselves and others, regardless of who they are or who the others may be. Thus SEL frameworks allow for increased integration of multiple cultural perspectives in the classroom promoting opportunities for students and educators to further develop cultural competencies. This is inherent in the

SEL competencies associated with interpersonal skills, such as social awareness and relationship building. (See [Cultural Competence and Inclusivity](#).)

SEL approaches provide explicit and intentional opportunities for students who do not usually think about other students' perspectives to take the time to think about the experiences of others, including their marginalized peers. SEL also allows for this conversation to happen and for students to work together with one another to get a better understanding of themselves and others. SEL is a preventative rather than reactive intervention, the core idea being that by building SEL skills and competencies, students should be better prepared for academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal challenges and thus, facilitate growth and development. In many cases, particularly those contexts where school staff are not diverse and communities are not integrated, this will need to be intentionally addressed—these skills are not developed in isolation or without intentional culturally responsive intervention. We are fully aware that racial disparities are deep in Minnesota schools and communities—intentionality in helping youth and adults achieve the promise of SEL will require ongoing support and integrated professional development, informed by rigorous assessment of both youth and adult SEL competencies.

SEL is a flexible practice and adaptable for implementation in a variety of settings and contexts. SEL has been successful in traditional public school settings and afterschool settings, not requiring a specific intervention or set structure. School staff can implement SEL interventions, eliminating the need for bringing in costly outsiders who do not know the students or communities, allowing school staff to capitalize on existing bonds with students, and subsequently enhancing these relationships. It provides a unique opportunity to engage community and afterschool partners, as they too are invested in the social and emotional wellbeing of students. In some districts, working to integrate culturally responsive principles and be intentional about addressing disparities and inequitable practices and policies, schools are hiring and working with cultural liaisons bridging school and community contexts. (See [Community Bridges](#).)

Lastly, SEL is most effective when implemented in a community that collectively recognizes the importance of developing SEL competencies. Depaoli and colleagues (2016) found in a national survey of school principals that principals are generally in support of SEL, but they require the support of teachers and other administrators and dedicated funding. In the same way that we require teachers to be subject-matter experts (in the subject area where they teach), teachers and adults in a school building should be competent in SEL areas being addressed in schools. As schools adopt goals to address racial and economic disparities, thus adults in the school must become competent in identifying and creating practices and policies that reverse those disparities.

In summary, SEL can potentially help address a range of issues, from decreased anxiety about being in the school setting, improved social skills for interacting with others, a more positive sense of self, and greater understanding of students from different backgrounds, all of which create a more positive climate and can improve attention on academics, which in turn enhances learning. Improved social and emotional skills maybe integral for improving effectiveness of cognitive interventions.

## **SEL in Action**

One pedagogical technique that includes both the explicit instruction and indirect promotion is Cooperative Learning (see the link in the Resource section). Through cooperative learning, students are encouraged to help one another but also are explicitly taught social skills that will better help them interact with one another (that then contributes to a more positive school environment). Implementation of Cooperative Learning requires teacher training, as teachers must create and facilitate lessons that focus on cooperative working groups, in which students rely on and teach one another, rather than just group work. Thus, Cooperative Learning may be more suitable for smaller classrooms.

Given the flexibility of SEL, many strategies may be successful for fostering SEL competencies, depending on the situation and context. The two major approaches, historically, have been (a) explicit instruction of SEL competencies, and (b) indirect inculcation through a positive learning environment. Again, both approaches require adults to be competent in the SEL areas being addressed and in the practices to support and develop SEL competencies among

youth. MDE is promoting an approach that asks educators to be explicit and intentional, but that SEL activities be embedded in existing instructional and school practices and policies. For SEL practices to be most successful, all school personnel must be attentive to the needs of all students as well as culturally competent. See [Adult Behaviors](#) and [Cultural Competency and Inclusivity](#)).

At the same time, it is not as easy as perhaps stated here. We need to have integrated discussions within and across schools regarding SEL and cultural competence, SEL for educators, and SEL in racialized contexts. Many Minnesota schools are implementing SEL in various ways in communities facing profoundly persistent inequities. We all need to examine the ways in which we pathologize students of color that continue to be overrepresented in emotional-behavioral disorder diagnoses and discipline referrals and outcomes. Although students are at the heart of the discussions around SEL, students are indicators of the health and success of the system.

## Resources for Practitioners

**Minnesota Resources:** <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/social/imp/>

- SEL Frameworks for Minnesota Schools
- SEL District Implementation and Professional Development Guidance
- SEL Assessment Guidance
- Ensuring Effective SEL Implementation

Minnesota Youth Development Research Group

Student SEL Profiles from the 2016 MN Student Survey (soon to be updated to 2019):

<http://www.edmeasurement.net/MSS/>

## General Resources:

- CASEL Model: <http://casel.org>
  - Implementation Resources: <https://casel.org/resources-support/>
  - SEL Assessment Guide (interactive): <http://measuringsel.casel.org/assessment-guide/>
  - Choosing and using SEL assessments: <http://measuringsel.casel.org/pdf/practitioner-guidance.pdf>
- American Institutes for Research
  - SEL Solutions: <https://www.air.org/resource/social-and-emotional-learning-sel-solutions-air>

## Program Resources:

- Guide for choosing SEL programming: <https://casel.org/guide/>
- Cooperative Learning: <http://co-operation.org>
- Second Step: <https://www.secondstep.org/>
- Head Start REDI: <https://csc.la.psu.edu/research/projects/head-start-redi>
- Checklist for culturally responsive and embedded SEL: <https://ice.aasb.org/wp-content/uploads/Checklist-for-Culturally-Responsive-and-Embedded-Social-and-Emotional-Learning.pdf>

# A Role for Social & Emotional Learning

## *Part Two: Aligning and Integrating Resilience and SEL Frameworks*

### **Overview**

SEL and resilience frameworks can be aligned in order to demonstrate their potential to boost outcomes for groups traditionally considered at risk and, in turn, improve educational equity. As researchers, it is easy to get caught up in the specifics of our niche areas of expertise—to fall prey to looking at problems through one lens. However, as educators and practitioners, we stand to benefit most from drawing from evidence and implementing effective practices informed by multiple disciplines and perspectives. This becomes especially relevant when thinking about education reform. This section aims to unify and reconcile frameworks that have common goals in order to see where they may align and inform one another in mutually beneficial ways, and ultimately, attempt to integrate them, where possible, to offer suggestions for tailoring education programming to improve access and equity. Although many scholars have spoken to the power of social and emotional learning (SEL) and the factors related to resilience independently, few have drawn explicit connections between SEL and resilience frameworks. We stand to benefit from looking at these two frameworks in tandem.

**Resilience theory** offers a conceptual scaffolding for understanding why some youth grow up to be healthy, high-achieving adults despite exposure to risk, challenge, and adversity. This theory provides a strengths-based conceptual framework that focuses on how promotive factors disrupt pathways from risk to negative outcomes (Garmezy, 1991; Masten et al., 2009; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982). The promotive factors that help youth avoid the negative effects of risks are often defined as either assets or resources.

**Assets** are positive factors that reside within individuals and communities, such as effective communication strategies, self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and a high level of self-efficacy (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), all things that have been incorporated in some way into SEL programming. We also explicitly emphasize that assets come in many forms—many of which we are not acknowledging because of our own limited experiences. Culture, language, faith, community, all embody assets in ways we continue to leave untapped (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004).

**Resources** are positive factors that help youth overcome risk but are external to the individual (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The term resources emphasizes and acknowledges the social and environmental influences on students' health and development, helps place resilience theory within a student's greater environmental context, and moves away from the conceptualizations of resilience as merely a static, individual trait. Although this term is deeply rooted and has a strong foundation in developmental psychology, this dynamic association between the web of assets and resources at an individual's disposal establishes resilience as a dynamic process (Zimmerman et al., 2013; Masten et al., 2009; Rutter, 1987). In a similar way, assets have been conceptualized as resources, including funds of knowledge, social capital, and cultural wealth (Denner et al., 2001; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Valdez, & Lugg, 2010). Although some have warned against the capitalization of such culturally-grounded assets, as related approaches have coerced assimilation and language loss, rather than promote social justice through the adoption of practice and policy frameworks that employ resistance, trust, spirituality, and love (Hinton, 2015).

Given the ostensible associations between SEL skills, problem solving, and resilience, systematic exploration of links between the construct of resilience and social emotional learning frameworks is important.



As described in Part One of this section, the umbrella of SEL aligns the work of educators, policymakers, and researchers, addressing our ability to support and build students' capacities to coordinate cognition, affect, and behavior. Researchers have provided substantial and compelling evidence that these SEL skills and competencies are amenable to change and can be successfully taught using a variety of approaches and formats (Jones & Kahn, 2017). This offers the possibility that cultivating key SEL skills would lay the foundation for students to be better equipped to navigate stress and daily challenges effectively (i.e., demonstrate resilience) to succeed in education through college, and onward into careers and life (Jones et al., 2016). The questions we must ask ourselves include: How are our practices and policies forwarding our equity goals in this respect? To what extent do the adults and education systems embody the best of SEL competencies? Are we equipped to engage in SEL development in the increasingly diverse student communities in our schools? Will we know if SEL is being coopted by inequitable policies and structures and used to defend existing implicit biases?

### Primary Aims

Despite apparent overlap between SEL and resilience, surprisingly little work has been conducted to establish explicit connections between these two frameworks.

To help remedy this lack of connections, we:

1. describe the construct of resilience and the underlying theory as it currently stands,
2. describe how resilience and SEL frameworks can be integrated where possible, and
3. make the case that integrating practices and policies that cultivate student resilience and support academic, social, and emotional learning, with explicit attention to the strategies adopted in Reimagine Minnesota – focusing on race, culture, and diversity – have immense potential to advance the achievement of equity goals.

### The Construct of Resilience and its Theoretical Development

Historically, youth researchers have often focused on cataloging risks and fixing problems. These kinds of studies are necessary and useful, but they are problem-focused reference points (in other words, a “deficit model”) that often translate to strategies that emphasize remediating or amelioration.

In contrast, understanding the processes that promote resilient functioning and positive outcomes in the face of stress, challenge, risk and/or adversity is the most effective pathway to change, and will likely have a better chance of succeeding than simply trying to eliminate stress. In contrast to paradigms that attempt to eliminate risk, a resilience oriented paradigm focuses researchers and practitioners on both the internal assets/skills that youth bring to their experiences as well as the positive external resources and relationships in youth's lives that become the focus of change strategies (Zimmerman, 2013). As described in Part One, SEL has similar aims to focus on asset building rather than targeting deficient social and emotional skills.

We are not saying that if we promote resilience, we no longer need to eliminate systemic stressors or eliminate risks. In contrast, we must do both. Through the science of epigenetics and what we know about multigenerational stress, abuse, and neglect, we have decades (if not centuries) of damage to undo and heavy work to create healthy environments, practices, and policies to eliminate current damage. Influenced by our own naïve negative personal theories of behavior, we adults tend to attribute behaviors to what we believe are the negative traits of youth and assume intentional deviance—versus seeing the positive assets of youth, their inherent capacity to develop positively, and the challenges they face (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & VanBockern, 2002). The prevalent use of behavior checklists, which consist of negative behaviors and traits, exemplifies this tendency. Such practices institutionalize implicit biases.

Generally, across various disciplines, researchers have used the term resilience to describe three types of phenomena:

1. good developmental outcomes despite high-risk status,
2. sustained competence under stress,
3. recovery or “bounce back” from trauma (Werner, 1995).

Under each of these conditions, behavioral scientists have focused their attention on protective factors, or mechanisms that moderate (or ameliorate) a person's reaction to a stressful situation or chronic adversity so that adaptation is more successful than it would be if the protective factors were not present (Werner, 1995).

Several clusters of protective factors have emerged as recurrent themes in the lives of children who overcome great odds. The **most notable assets** (characteristics of the individual) are that “resilient children are engaging to other people—adults and peers alike; they have good communication and problem-solving skills, including the ability to recruit ‘substitute caregivers’; they have a talent or hobby that is valued by their elders or peers; and they have faith that their own actions can make a positive difference in their own lives” (Werner, 1995, p. 83). The **most notable resources** are affectional ties that encourage trust, autonomy, and initiative. These ties (in other words, support systems at home, in the community, and/or at school) work to reinforce and reward the competencies of resilient children and provide them with positive role models (Werner, 1995). Thus, it follows that the association between assets and resources is dynamic and bidirectional, as they actively work to reinforce one-another. This acknowledgement has spurred another burgeoning area of research in the study of resilience that focuses on how the cumulative effects of multiple promotive factors across ecological domains (e.g., individual, family, community) more accurately reflect the complex nature of influences on youth development (Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006; Stoddard et al., 2012, as cited in Werner, 1995).

Other salient protective factors that have operated in the lives of resilient youths are beliefs in their own effectiveness (self-efficacy, internal locus of control) and an overall positive self-concept (Werner & Smith, 1982). However, Werner and Smith found that individuals who showcased resilience had a particular continuity in their life-course. That is, their individual dispositions and skills led them to select and construct environments that, in turn, reinforced and sustained their active approach to life and rewarded their special competencies. Taken collectively, it stands to reason that youth who are better able to appraise stressful life events adaptively are also better able to figure out strategies for coping with adversity, either through their own efforts or by actively reaching out to other people for help (Werner, 1995). These findings together argue that resilience is not only a skill-set we ought to be cultivating, but also that we should be offering institutional supports to facilitate its development in school-settings.

The field now views resilience as a multimodal construct that can be demonstrated in multiple domains including the academic, emotional, and social spheres. Therefore, resilience in one sphere may not necessarily carry over into all other aspects of an individual's life (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). An overall or general resilience score that lumps together all types of resilience might not provide the most accurate reflection of an individual's experiences even though that is previously how resilience was conceptualized. For example, a student could be academically resilient but not emotionally resilient. Evidence that at-risk students excel within a particular adjustment domain should never obscure the possibility of significant problems within other spheres. Therefore, Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) suggested a more nuanced approach to investigating resilience, asserting that if resilience represents largely distinct constructs, then it is best to examine them separately. Encouragingly, researchers are increasingly using circumscribed terms such as *educational resilience* (Wang et al., 1994), *emotional resilience* (Kline & Short, 1991), and *behavioral resilience* (Rende, 2012), thereby bringing greater precision to terminology commonly used in the literature.

Building on these modern perspectives, researchers have identified (as well as replicated in numerous settings) a number of characteristics that are consistently associated with resilience (Masten et al., 2009; Murphey et al., 2013). Among these characteristics are having:

- one or more adults providing caring support;
- an appealing, sociable, easygoing disposition;
- good thinking skills (including judgment and social skills);
- one or more talents (things a person does really well);
- belief in oneself and trust in one's ability to make decisions (self-efficacy, self-confidence);
- religiosity or spirituality.

Masten and colleagues (2009) argue that resilience arises from seemingly ordinary protective processes, “common but powerful”, that protect human development under diverse conditions. Therefore, the greatest threats imposed to youth may be the adversities that damage or undermine these basic human protective processes. Rutter (1987) identified potential mechanisms that protect people against psychological risks associated with adversity, in association with four main processes:

1. reduction of risk impact,
2. reduction of negative chain reactions,
3. establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and
4. opening up of opportunities.

Crucial to our efforts, Rutter’s work on psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms further solidifies the potential connection between resilience and SEL, as contemporary SEL frameworks seem to address the latter two processes. These processes are encompassed in the self-management competency of the CASEL framework and, in turn, may foster skills and provide resources to disrupt stress, risk, and reduce negative chains of reactions (process a and b). It follows that application of resilience theory (Zimmerman, 2013) can provide a conceptual framework and unifying themes that could guide researchers and practitioners interested in studying and cultivating students’ assets and resources.

Researchers have shown how we might use acquired understandings about resilience alongside SEL frameworks to boost social and emotional skills and student resilience in the educational domain. Many of the current SEL competencies as defined in Part One align with the evidence-based assets we might like to foster, and arguably have the potential to be crucial antecedents of resilient functioning. Complementary research based on social-psychological theories uncovers the complex social dynamics that occur within school settings (e.g., theories about implicit attitudes, prejudice, attributions by and about teachers and peers). Together, the guidelines on effective resources plus theory-informed approaches put forth by researchers focused on resilience promotion help us to better structure supportive school environments that further cultivate and reinforce SEL skills.

### **Current Practical Efforts Aimed at Purposefully Connecting Resilience and SEL**

Educators, policy-makers, and mental health professionals in Australia are making great strides toward establishing explicit connections and demonstrating the overlap between SEL and student resilience. Currently, the State Government of Victoria is in the process of building a website that can serve as a repository of mental and interpersonal wellbeing resources and learning materials for primary and secondary school teachers. They argue that schools can enhance resilience through programs that build positive social norms and generate a sense of connectedness to teachers, peers, and the academic goals of the school.

Guided by a resilience focus, practitioners in Victoria, Australia, created the Building Resilience model to support schools to foster the learning of resilience and wellbeing of children and young people (see the link in the Resource section). This evidence-based approach to developing personal and social awareness includes aspects such as self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. They argue that one of the best ways that schools can promote resilient functioning in children and young people is through the teaching of evidence-based programs that explicitly foster SEL. They provide support for the idea that educational settings promote the personal and social capabilities of students by incorporating explicit evidence-based health, well-being, and SEL programs into their greater academic program, and through the use of collaborative learning activities across the curriculum.

So far, researchers have demonstrated immense potential for the proposal that SEL is related to student resilience, and, in turn, long-term social, achievement, health, and well-being outcomes. More specifically, students who participated in rigorously designed and well-taught SEL programs were more resilient, show improved academic outcomes, demonstrate more positive social behaviors, and were less likely to engage in risky and disruptive behavior, including risk-taking with alcohol and other drugs. The most effective programs include a combination of knowledge,

social and life skills, normative approaches, critical thinking exercises, and negotiation skills. These skills are taught through a variety of methods including: collaborative games, role-plays, stories, group tasks, experiential exercises and class discussions. However, most notably, these SEL programs are most effective when delivered within a broader well-being curriculum that incorporates a focus on a range of social, physical, and mental health issues, when delivered by their classroom teacher, when provided in schools with a positive relational climate, and presented as part of broader organizational, relational, and pedagogical strategies to promote well-being. Said differently, as well as being an outcome of SEL development, resilience can be an effective component of SEL interventions.

### **Clarifying the Mission of Schools**

Preliminary support clearly demonstrates that resilience and SEL frameworks could meaningfully inform one another to benefit students. Additionally, the work of policy-makers and practitioners showcases how current practices are being implemented to establish more explicit connections between SEL and student resilience. However, with the recommendations of what constitutes effective delivery of an SEL curriculum in mind, an important ingredient in this puzzle remains to be addressed: How can we make sure that the greater environment, classroom context, and school culture effectively reinforce SEL direct instruction practices? One potential course of action is to unify ALL school personnel (educators, administrators, school leadership, and mental health practitioners alike) under a common mission. In fact, upon closer inspection, they may find that their overarching goals are the same. If so, another challenge to address is: How can we make these connections and similarities more overt?

In general, stakeholders agree that SEL is vital and represents skills that we would actively want to cultivate in every student. However, Jonathan Cohen (2006) claims that:

There is a paradox in our preK-12 schools, and within teacher education. Parents and teachers want schooling to support children's ability to become lifelong learners who are able to love, work, and act as responsible members of the community. Yet, we have not substantively integrated these values into our schools or into the training we give teachers.

Additionally, Cohen asserts that social, emotional, ethical, and academic education is a human right that all students are entitled to, and argues that ignoring any aspect of this undertaking amounts to a social injustice. He presents a compelling argument that the goals of education need to be reframed to prioritize not only academic learning, but also social, emotional, and ethical competencies. (See [Student Voice](#).)

In brief, Cohen (2006) provides a strong argument and recommendations for:

- contemporary best practices and policies in association with creating safe and caring school climates;
- home-school partnerships;
- a pedagogy informed by SEL and ethical concerns;
- scientifically sound measures of social, emotional, and ethical learning; and
- an action research partnerships between researchers and practitioners to develop authentic methods of evaluation.

Finally, he acknowledges the current gulf that exists between evidence-based guidelines for SEL, which are being increasingly adopted at the state-level, and what is taught in schools of education and practiced in preK-12 schools. He does this, not to promote discouragement or to create dissent, but rather to paint a fuller picture of the considerations to acknowledge moving forward. Ultimately, he ends on a hopeful note by demonstrating that the priorities of resilience promotion researchers, school-based mental health practitioners, educators and SEL frameworks are not competing but rather complementary.

Cohen (2006) describes essential skills as:

- the ability to listen to ourselves and others,

- the ability to be critical and reflective,
- the ability to be flexible problem-solvers and decision-makers (including the ability to resolve conflict in creative, non-violent ways),
- communication abilities (e.g., being able to participate in discussions and argue thoughtfully), and
- collaborative capacities (e.g., learning to compromise and work together toward a common goal).

Cohen ultimately suggests that SEL competencies including development of resilience provide precisely the foundation needed for effective participation in democracy, as well as improved quality of life:

Consequently, when evidence-based social, emotional, and ethical education is integrated into traditional teaching and learning, educators can hone the essential academic and social skills, understanding, and dispositions that support effective participation in democracy. (p. 202)

When framed in this way, it is likely as well as practically feasible that these frameworks (SEL and resilience) are not only compatible, but also reinforce each other. This again solidifies and demonstrates how drawing from, aligning, and integrating the resilience and SEL literatures would be beneficial for achieving ALL the goals of schools.

When investigating this topic with an integrated multi-disciplinary perspective in mind, researchers from across various fields (e.g., risk prevention, health promotion, resilience promotion, character education, mental health, and SEL) have identified two core processes that characterize effective SEL and academic educational efforts (Cohen, 2001; Zins et al., 2004):

- creating long-term educator-parent partnerships to create safe, caring, participatory, and responsive schools and home; and
- purposively teaching children to be more socially, emotionally, ethically, and cognitively competent.

Ultimately, what emerges from Cohen's work is a five-step method for attempting to create an educational system that effectively cultivates a student's social, emotional, ethical, and academic competence (and consequently, resilience):

1. The first step entails a period of initial planning, discovery, and community building.
2. Second, schools must create a climate for learning or systemic interventions designed to foster safe, caring, participatory, and responsive schools, homes, and communities.
3. Third, there must be investment in the creation and maintenance of long-term school-home partnerships.
4. Fourth, pedagogy (the method of direct instruction) needs to actively become more socially and emotionally competent as well as ethically inclined.
5. Finally, to secure successful implementation and continuous improvement, an on-going process of rigorous evaluation must occur.

Addressing both of the two aforementioned processes (one at the individual-level and one systemic) that emerged from Cohen and colleagues' work as well engaging in the five steps for moving forward have the potential to fulfill the primary and strategic goals of schools. These include the goals to prepare all students for effective participation in a democratic society, boost well-being, and equip students to be resilient in the face of stress, adversity, and set-backs by independently responding adaptively or by seeking out the help and/or resources necessary to do so. Simultaneously, we all are responsible for dismantling inequitable practices, policies, and structures that maintain inequities in schools and communities across the state.

## Conclusion

We reviewed major findings within the resilience literature to identify points of synergy with SEL frameworks in order to provide suggestions for improving practice. Examining these topics together clarifies the power of integrating SEL

and resilience practices and begins to shed light on how the association between SEL and resilience might function to bolster student success in school and beyond. These frameworks must be understood and addressed on individual (asset and competence), relational, and institutional (resources, programs, and policies) levels. Acknowledging these dynamics offers insight into how we might begin to change schools to unify all key stakeholders in providing an educational environment that cultivates the critical skills students need to be healthy, happy, and effective participants in an ever-changing democratic society.

## **Resources for Practitioners**

*“Resilience, Rights, and Respectful Relationships”*

Module: <https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/ResourcePackage/ByPin?pin=2JZX4R>

State Government of Victoria (Australia) Education and Training Website: Mental and Interpersonal Wellbeing Resources for Educators.

Retrieved from <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/default.aspx>



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## Acknowledgments

The University of Minnesota team was supported by funds from The Minneapolis Foundation, the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, and Greater Twin Cities United Way, in addition to the support of the CEHD Educational Equity Resource Center and the Jim and Carmen Campbell Leadership Chair in Education & Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

The team also received support from a number of colleagues, most notably Dr. Muhammad Khalifa, Professor and Beck Chair of Ideas in Education, and graduate students Elena Gullickson, Ashley Hufnagle, and Yu-Chi Wang.

This report, containing guidance intended to extend the *Reimagine Minnesota: A Collective Education Roadmap for Action* report, is offered as a model of engaged scholarship, consistent with the research and discovery, teaching and learning, and service and outreach missions of the University of Minnesota, the state's land grant institution of higher education.

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# Appendix

## **Excerpt from Reimagine Minnesota: A Collective Education Roadmap for Action**

In March 2016, a group of metropolitan superintendents gathered together to discuss the future of education in the State of Minnesota. Specifically, the superintendents acknowledged that ensuring equity and excellence for all students is the most pressing issue in education today. They also recognize that the demographic composition of our state is rapidly changing, and that Minnesota will have an older, more diverse population throughout the state in the coming years. Our K-12 education system is the foundation for the upcoming workforce, yet our educational data and statistics show that schools and districts need to improve all of the educational markers that serve as benchmarks of success in the current educational system.

All students and all Minnesotans will reap enormous benefits when we create lasting equity, integration and excellence in our education system. Aside from fulfilling the moral and constitutional imperative of equal opportunity for all, ensuring an equitable, integrated and excellent education for all students will secure the highly skilled workforce Minnesota needs to compete in the rapidly changing global economy. A November 2014 report from the Center for American Progress estimates that the U.S. economy will need nearly 83 million new workers by 2030 to fill the jobs created by projected economic growth and to replace the large number of Baby Boomers who will be retiring. It is imperative that we create an education system that allows all students the opportunity to reach their full potential if we are to address our workforce needs.

In October 2016, 17 superintendents and educational leaders asked the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) to form an Ad hoc Committee to develop a Collective Education Action Plan to address integration, access, opportunity and educational excellence for all students. The Ad hoc Committee was sanctioned by the full membership of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) and updates about the work of the committee were presented and discussed at AMSD's monthly meetings. With support from AMSD, the superintendents worked together to collect community voice that would inform the work of the committee as it created a plan and recommendations for new local and statewide policies and practices in the hope of creating a model of education designed for the success of all students.

From January through May 2017, parents, students, cultural representatives, community members, business leaders and other education stakeholders, were invited to Reimagine Minnesota and conceptualize a new model of education that's designed for the success of all students. Each participant was welcomed, honored and respected for who they are and the contributions they offered.

The World Café convening model was chosen to host community conversations. The World Café is a method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in real life situations. Prior to each World Café event, students were trained and volunteered to be table hosts. It was important to have students included and visible in the process. The table hosts were responsible to help set the context; create a hospitable space; explore questions that mattered; encourage everyone's contribution; cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives; listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions; and help harvest and share collective discoveries.

At each World Café, the environment was set up like a café, with tables for six or eight participants, tablecloths covered by poster paper, colored markers and light refreshments. Participants sat at a table and conversed over three powerful questions lasting from 20 to 30 minutes each. After each round of questions, the table host remained at the table, while others traveled to different tables. Table hosts welcomed newcomers to their tables and shared the essence of that table's conversation. The newcomers related any conversational threads which they carried with them – and then the conversation continued, deepening as the rounds progressed. The process repeated for a third time until a harvesting of information commenced during the last half hour of each World Café.

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Three powerful questions were developed to query participants regarding the most effective ways to achieve educational equity, integration and excellence.

1. Describe your vision of an equitable, integrated and excellent education for all students. What does it look like, feel like?
2. As you think about the challenges, we will face to build an equitable, integrated and excellent education for all students, what is at the heart of the matter for you?
3. What are the most urgent changes we need to make so that all students have the best chance of being successful? What barriers do we need to move out of the way so that our work has the best chance of being successful?

Two preparatory World Cafés and 12 official World Cafés were held during the community convening process. Over 3,000 students, parents, community members, and K-12 education stakeholders attended the convenings garnering over 10,000 responses, suggestions and community-based comments related to what could and should be done to ensure all students in Minnesota receive an equitable, integrated and excellent education. The information received through the collective dialogue helped inform the superintendent committee as they forged a path to build a Collective Education Action Plan that ensures success for all students.

During the World Cafés, several forms of harvesting took place: graphic recording; posting of table notes; and large facilitated conversations after all three table conversations were completed. Videos and photos along with individual interviews also captured the participant experience.

One of the most important events was the student conference consisting of over 300 students from all districts involved. The student conference process called Open Space Technology, allowed students the opportunity to lead and facilitate conversations that are important to them. The goal was to create time and space for students to engage deeply and creatively around issues that mattered to them. The agenda was set by the students and resulted in a transformative experience for everyone involved. The conference was powerful and brought student voice to the work.

In addition to the World Café convenings, a Business & Cultural Community Leaders' luncheon was held at the University of Minnesota, McNamara Alumni Center. The luncheon was held to gather input from metropolitan area business partners, leaders and representatives from various cultural communities, government partners, community organizations and universities and colleges. During the luncheon, a modified World Café that included the original two questions plus two modified questions directed to the business and community partners was discussed.

Following the convenings, the districts participated in one of the most, if not the most, important elements of a World Café; large group harvesting of the themes, ideas and insights that emerged. The insights, once hidden, became visible through the harvesting process. This was accomplished during half-day synthesizing sessions involving representatives from each school district. Participants reviewed and prioritized ideas from the World Cafés, student conference and business luncheon.

The overwhelming response from four synthesis workshops that reviewed 12 World Cafes convenings of more than 3,000 participant voices and a student conference of more than 300 high school students can be summed up by the following statement “SEE ME.” Three overarching recommendations emerged:

1. Effective, diverse stakeholders who use trusting relationships to create welcoming classrooms, schools and communities that meet the needs (hopes & dreams) of all students and families.
2. Personalized relevant education and youth development that guarantees access to rigorous learning and eliminating predictability based on race.
3. Equitable resources (time, talent, funds) aligned to student needs (hopes & dreams) that enable every district to “see all” and “serve all.”

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In response to the education goals identified by the school community stakeholders, superintendents and their teams joined together to develop a plan for achieving the goals to SEE, SERVE and SUPPORT ALL students. First, they met in several district cluster work sessions to propose concrete actions for each goal. Next, over 150 school leaders were invited to five planning sessions to review the action ideas from the cluster meetings and determine realistic directions for creating lasting equity and excellence in education for all students. They analyzed the key barriers to ensuring education equity and excellence for all students and identified a system of strategies required to achieve the shared education goals.

The full roadmap is available on the Association of Metropolitan School Districts website at <https://www.amsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Reimagine-MN-Roadmap-2.pdf>