



## Culturally Responsive Education: The Need

In the current political environment, when the prevalence of racism and other biases are on sharp display across the country, cities must take a hard look at how public schools serve to either perpetuate or confront these forces. The fact is, research shows that racial bias, and its many layers of impact, is still widespread across every aspect of the public school experience:

- White teachers have lower expectations for students of color, and are significantly less likely to expect Black students to finish high school and college<sup>i</sup>
- School staff frequently perceive Black boys as threatening and dangerous for the same behaviors that are seen as innocent for White students.<sup>ii</sup>
- There are significant disparities and stereotypes in how teachers communicate with parents from different racial, ethnic and immigrant backgrounds.<sup>iii</sup>
- NY State teacher certification exams discriminate against Black and Latino teacher candidates, resulting in a scarcity of Black and Latino teachers and school leaders<sup>iv</sup>
- Black and Latino teachers leave teaching at faster rates than their White peers, due to limitations on professional advancement and stagnation in disciplinary and remedial roles<sup>v</sup>
- In 2015, only 15% of children's books were written by African-American or Latino authors, or focused on African-American or Latino characters<sup>vi</sup>
- Of the hundreds of courses offered to NY State teachers to fulfill professional development requirements, only a few dozen address race, culture, bias, identity or school climate<sup>vii</sup>
- In a national survey of pre-service and current public school teachers on their beliefs about race, there was broad agreement that race should be discussed in classrooms, but teachers felt unprepared and unable to lead those conversations.<sup>viii</sup>
- In NYC, more than 85% of the students are people of color, yet 60% of the teachers are White<sup>ix</sup>

This reality creates a culture gap between students and the educational system that contributes to student disengagement from school, and to the academic achievement gap. The Connecticut State Department of Education describes this culture gap, and the solution:

*... one of the key factors influencing poor student achievement among students of color is the cultural incongruity between the school and the home. This combined with a further cultural mismatch between teaching styles and curriculum, and that of the culture and learning styles of students of color, leads to a failure to engage students effectively. Culturally responsive education is a teaching approach that helps students use their cultural backgrounds to aid in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Culturally responsive teachers use culturally relevant instructional material, affirm student cultural identities, and use cultural backgrounds as a knowledge base for learning and academic success. While helping to close the achievement/opportunity gaps, culturally responsive education also helps fight racism and other forms of discrimination, bias and oppression.<sup>x</sup>*

# Culturally Responsive Education: The Solution

In the current political environment, schools must inoculate and fortify students against the inundation of hateful and oppressive messages, by arming them with a deep knowledge and pride in who *they* are, and who *we* are collectively as New York City. Schools can do this by adopting culturally responsive education and becoming safe havens from racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia and other biases. Here's what culturally responsive education looks like in action:

- At Cambridge Street Upper School in Massachusetts, teachers meet every week in small groups to discuss race. Teachers examine their own upbringing and biases, develop comfort and skill talking about racial issues, and build supportive relationships with their peers around the issue.<sup>xi</sup>
- Denver Public Schools requires all new public school teachers to take a 3-hour seminar in culturally responsive teaching. The course is also offered to school leaders, custodians, bus drivers, and security guards, and teachers can sign up for additional advanced courses.<sup>xii</sup>
- Parents and community residents in the Bronx took school staff on yearly tours of the neighborhood, to learn about historic community sites, meet local leaders and learn about the rich culture of the neighborhood where their students live
- Many schools across the country participate in Parent-Teacher Home Visits, in which teachers go in pairs to visit families in their homes, and learn about their hopes and dreams for their children
- At Highbridge Green School in the Bronx, parents and teachers co-wrote a unit in which students read testimonies of immigrant experiences, conducted interviews of their parents, and then visited Chinatown to connect with the experiences of another immigrant group.<sup>xiii</sup>
- An elementary school in Alaska greatly increased math achievement for Native American students and all students by connecting math concepts with traditional cultural activities such as basket making, fire building, star navigating, fishing, collecting food, weaving, etc.<sup>xiv</sup>
- In 2016, California passed a law creating a state commission that will create a model Ethnic Studies curriculum, which will be offered to all high schools to adopt.<sup>xv</sup>

## The Impact

In Tucson, AZ in the early 2000s, all students were offered the opportunity to participate in a Mexican-American Studies curriculum that was academically rigorous and aligned with state standards.<sup>xvi</sup> Research from 2010 showed that students who participated had significantly greater test scores in Math, Reading and Writing and were significantly more likely to graduate from high school. Low-income students and the academically struggling students showed the largest gains.<sup>xvii</sup> They were also more engaged in literature and history lessons, and more likely to have a positive perception of their ability to succeed in math and science.<sup>xviii</sup>

In 2010, the San Francisco Unified School District implemented an Ethnic Studies program for 9<sup>th</sup> graders. A 2016 research study found that over four years, this program produced improvements in academic performance for students who were in jeopardy of failing. Because of the Ethnic Studies program, 9<sup>th</sup> grade student attendance increased by 21 percentage points, GPA increased by 1.4 grade points, and earned credits increased by 23 credits.<sup>xix</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> [http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1248&context=up\\_workingpapers](http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1248&context=up_workingpapers)
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older.aspx>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/which-parents-are-teachers-most-likely-to-contact/507755/>
- <sup>iv</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/06/nyregion/judge-rules-second-version-of-new-york-teachers-exam-is-also-racially-biased.html?mtrref=undefined&gwh=5EDF000C571021BBF28D44AA48180E7F&gwt=pay>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf> and <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ThroughOurEyes.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>
- <sup>vii</sup> In analyzing course catalogs from a sample of the largest New York State approved vendors, professional development courses involving these topics accounts for approximately 10% of courses offered in a given semester
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/01/how-teachers-learn-to-discuss-racism/512474/>
- <sup>ix</sup> <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/2014teacherdemographics.pdf>
- <sup>x</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education: [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/cre\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/cre_handbook.pdf)
- <sup>xi</sup> Cummings, Jean. "Upper school tackles race head on, weekly, with intense cultural proficiency initiative." Cambridge Day. N.p., 25 May 2016. Web. 07 Jan. 2017.
- <sup>xii</sup> <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2016/08/12/one-way-denver-public-schools-is-addressing-race-and-culture-in-the-classroom/>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2014/04/07/highbridge-green-school-students-present-a-project-their-parents-helped-design/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Kisker, Ellen Eliason, Jerry Lipka, Barbara L. Adams, Anthony Rickard, Dora Andrew-Ihrke, Eva Evelyn Yanez, and Ann Millard. "The Potential of a Culturally Based Supplemental Mathematics Curriculum to Improve the Mathematics Performance of Alaska Native and Other Students." *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 43.1 (2012): 75. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.
- <sup>xv</sup> [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2016/09/california\\_ethnic\\_studies\\_law.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2016/09/california_ethnic_studies_law.html)
- <sup>xvi</sup> Cabrera, N. L., Milem, J. F., Jaquette, O., & Marx, R. W. (2014). Missing the (Student Achievement) Forest for All the (Political) Trees: Empiricism and the Mexican American Studies Controversy in Tucson. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(6), 1084-1118.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Cabrera et al., 2014
- <sup>xviii</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/01/mexican-american-studies-student-achievement\\_n\\_6249592.html?1421108833](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/01/mexican-american-studies-student-achievement_n_6249592.html?1421108833)
- <sup>xix</sup> <http://news.stanford.edu/2016/01/12/ethnic-studies-benefits-011216/>