



Racial Justice in the Classroom: CEJ Platform for Culturally Responsive Education

As parents, we want our children to graduate from high school prepared for college and careers and lives of learning and leadership. While NYC schools are some of the most culturally and linguistically diverse in the nation, with 180 languages spoken, enormous achievement gaps remain. In 2016, only 67% of Black and Latino students and 31% of English Language Learners graduated from high school in four years, compared to 82% of White students. Clearly, what the school system is currently offering many students of color is inadequate.

Many destructive forces contribute to these unacceptable outcomes, including the ways that systemic racism, overt and implicit bias play out inside schools, and create a “culture gap” that contributes to the achievement gap. Studies show that nationally, White school staff often have lower expectations for students of colorⁱ, are more likely to suspend students of color than White students for the same behaviorsⁱⁱ, have inadequate options for books by and about people of colorⁱⁱⁱ, and want to discuss race in the classroom, but feel unprepared to do so.^{iv} These are unacceptable educational conditions, and in a political climate in which students are faced with hateful incidents and policies, there is a moral imperative to address them. NYC has the best teachers and principals in the nation, unwaveringly committed to student success. In order to help them achieve their goals, improve outcomes for all students and create oases from racism, sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia and other biases, the NYC school system needs **Culturally Responsive Education**.

Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) is a method of rigorous, student-centered education that cultivates critical thinking instead of just test-taking skills; relates academic study to contemporary issues and students’ experiences; fosters positive academic, racial and cultural identities; develops students’ ability to connect across cultures; empowers students as agents of social change; and inspires students to fall in love with learning. Research demonstrates that for students of color as well as White students, CRE decreases dropout rates and suspensions, and increases student participation, confidence, academic achievement and graduation rates. Given the toxic political climate, it is critical that the NYC Department of Education become a national model of equity by embracing Culturally Responsive Education to eradicate racial disparities in public education.

CEJ calls on the NYC Department of Education to implement CRE in the following ways:

- I. **Staff at all levels of NYC schools must represent the diversity of the student population and be skilled in culturally responsive education and anti-discriminatory practices**
 - a. Develop a more diverse pipeline of teachers by expanding programs to recruit and retain an additional 1,000 teachers and 250 school leaders of color by 2020
 - b. Require that staff at all levels of the DOE are skilled in CRE, from the DOE Cabinet and leadership teams to school instructional and operations staff, by providing:
 - i. Extensive ongoing CRE training with expert providers, including workshops on ELL and newcomer students, through professional learning such as the 80-minutes on Mondays, PD days, curriculum institutes, Showcase Schools, and trainings for School Leadership Teams and other school-based teams

- ii. CRE Lead Teachers who serve as in-house experts to coach and support teachers, develop curriculum, and share best practices with other schools
- iii. CRE courses to fulfill professional development requirements such as the 100 hours for NY State and 30 hours for career advancement in the NYC DOE
- iv. CRE in DOE principal and teacher recruitment and training programs such as Teaching Fellows, LEAP, teaching residencies and New Teacher Week
- c. Create a micro-credentialing system to recognize school staff with expertise in cultural proficiency, and inform hiring and promotion decisions

II. All NYC public schools must offer a variety of classes, curricula, projects and resources that are grounded in the rich diversity of the NYC student population

- a. Create and staff an Office of Culturally Responsive Education within the DOE's Division of Teaching and Learning to help integrate CRE throughout the system
- b. Convene and support teachers to collaboratively develop key resources such as:
 - i. Curriculum modules that infuse CRE throughout the standards-aligned curriculum, using project-based learning instead of test-centered learning and elevating diverse voices every day, in every subject, and in all grades
 - ii. Specialized preK-12 courses that focus on the histories and cultures of African, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern and Native heritage people in NYC schools, and the intersections with gender, LGBTQ and religious diversity
 - iii. Interactive, online CRE resource list that includes lesson plans, book lists, CRE expert providers, websites and apps, cultural assets, etc.
- c. Expand curriculum and materials that schools can purchase with DOE funds, to include more diverse, contemporary and culturally accurate texts and resources
- d. Require that classroom and school libraries have an abundance of books authored by and featuring characters representative of the diverse populations of NYC

III. All schools must establish a positive, culturally responsive school culture that respects and honors youth of all races, cultures and abilities

- a. Require and fund training on culturally responsive discipline practices for staff, parents and students, including full-time Restorative Justice Coordinators in schools
- b. Eliminate arrests and summons for all non-criminal violations and remove metal detectors, which have a disproportionate negative impact on students of color
- c. Create safe spaces for student-led conversations, exploration and leadership around race, culture and other core identities

IV. Parent engagement efforts must be culturally responsive, value parents as assets and experts, and build the capacity of school staff to engage effectively with families

- a. Expand research-based models such as Parent-Teacher Home Visits, Academic Parent-Teacher Teams, Parent Education & Empowerment Partners
- b. Require and support schools to conduct yearly tours of their neighborhood for school staff, in partnership with parents and neighborhood organizations
- c. Offer know-your-rights trainings for families in their native languages, and strengthen translation and interpretation services at all schools

ⁱ http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1248&context=up_workingpapers

ⁱⁱ <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://cdbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>

^{iv} <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/01/how-teachers-learn-to-discuss-racism/512474/>