

Strategies to Support Equitable Learning Environments for Teachers and Teaching Staff

(Please see the introductory topic brief for all school staff)

What Works	STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES <u>TEACHERS AND TEACHING STAFF CAN ENACT</u>
Use of cultural awareness framework in teaching	Promote a “ <u>decolonial</u> ” classroom (click here to request access to this free guide and see p. 10) atmosphere that represents, affirms and supports students to explore their personal, cultural, racial, and academic identities and proactively dispel stereotypes. Have students engage in developmentally appropriate lessons that address topics like mass incarceration, police brutality, civil rights, immigration, racial profiling, healthcare disparities, unequal pay issues, trauma, women's rights, LGBTQ+ culture, disability rights, and privilege. Have students discuss and question the contributing factors to these issues and teach them to think critically on how these issues impact them personally and others. Nurture student agency, self-directed learning, and critical consciousness.
Incorporate students' cultural background and identities in curriculum, lessons, and classroom materials	Ensure that your students see themselves in course content and materials at all times and not simply during holidays or activities (e.g., Hispanic Heritage Month or Black History Month). While accurately reflecting the experiences and struggles of marginalized groups, be mindful not to present groups exclusively in the context of historical oppression; students should also learn about their triumphs and successes. Help students learn about various topics from individuals who look like them. Be intentional in representing students from different backgrounds and identities in books, posters, and other printed materials in the classroom but do not expect students to speak on behalf of, or represent, those in their identity groups. Practice “ <u>reality pedagogy</u> ” to connect academic content to events happening in the world.
Check your language practices	Allow students to speak comfortably in their language with each other or to switch between languages. If a student uses terms from another language, request a translation of the term, even if it requires an interruption to the discussion. Students will feel empowered and you will demonstrate your engagement in the conversation. Similarly, be open to different modes of expression and avoid relying on a rigid discussion format as these can stifle students' communication practices. For instance, it is okay for your room to be loud, as long as the discussions are engaging and meaningful. While loudness can be construed as unruliness, in the context of lively, academic discussion, it may actually be indicative of passion for and engagement with the topic. Prompt and structure classroom dialogue in ways that cater to the diverse needs, backgrounds, and skills of your students. While some students may prefer to participate in lively discussions, be mindful that others may contribute to dialogue in different ways and may prefer a more “volume-controlled” setting. Click here to request access to this free guide for more information on this and other important steps.
Design differentiated opportunities to develop and demonstrate mastery	Design multiple pathways to meaningful participation in the classroom. Providing opportunities to learn about and share in discussions in ways that are culturally responsive and that students feel comfortable using. Find ways to use student's unique assets and strengths to measure and demonstrate mastery in a specific topic area.
Engage in equity-orientated social and emotional learning	<u>Equity-oriented (or transformative) social and emotional learning (SEL)</u> centers collaboration, voice, engagement, and self-reflection. It is the process whereby young people and adults build strong, respectful, and lasting relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine root causes of equality, and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal well-being. When schools implement “color or power blind” SEL, they may be unintentionally reproducing inequities and coercing students to comply with a set of rules that may not be culturally competent and may be potentially harmful. Anchor social and emotional learning on people's lived experiences. Click here for CASEL's “SEL as a lever for equity” (and other) series.

Note: This brief is for informational purposes only. The information, practices and resources linked may not represent the opinions, claims, or recommendations of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) or Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey