

PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Introduction

English Learners (ELs) are a highly heterogeneous and complex group of students with diverse gifts, educational needs, backgrounds, languages, and goals. School staff can play a significant role in supporting ELs and their families by building a welcoming environment. Nurturing a culture of respect, care and inclusion of differences among the whole school community is very important for supporting ELs academic achievement. The following specific suggestions will assist in promoting cultural awareness in the school and the classrooms.

School Cultural Awareness

- **Get to know the community:** Accurate knowledge about the diversity of families in the school community, and their needs and preferences for receiving information, will help guide school policies and practices around communication. It is most important to connect with and understand individual families and their needs.
- **Communicate Effectively:** School correspondence, displays and activities should include and support the diverse cultural backgrounds of all families. Classroom practices may need to be adapted to enhance communication between teaching staff and students, and amongst students from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Engage parents and guardians:** When spoken or written English is a barrier, interpreters or translated materials can help school staff and families communicate with one another. Contacting parents/caregivers prior to, or early during the new school year may also help to involve them. Having an ‘open door’ policy at designated times may help parents/guardians to be more inclined to approach teachers about issues or questions they may have regarding their child.
- **Acknowledge Diverse Languages:** Parents feel welcome when information is presented to them in their native language. Signs and poster in the hallway and around the school encourages and motivates students to feel good about who they are and their native land.

Classroom Cultural Awareness

- **Acknowledge students’ differences and commonalities.** - Story telling is one important strategy that can be used across grade levels. Asking students to tell a story that is either popular in their home country, or draws on their own experiences, or allowing them to tell it both in their native language and in English, can help build their confidence sending a powerful message of cross-cultural appreciation.

IRVINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Pedro J. Ruiz, Ph.D., Supervisor, Department of ESL/Bilingual/World Language Programs
1 University Place, 2nd Floor, Irvington, NJ 07111
Phone: (973) 399-6800 Ext. 1672

- **Promote equity and mutual respect among students** – All students need to feel that they are fairly treated and respected.
- **Learn how to correctly pronounce all students' names**
- **Validate students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials** - Teachers should implement classroom activities that culturally support all student's heritage (e.g. Show and Tell, storytelling).
- **Educate students about the diversity of the world around them** – Teachers need to provide students with learning opportunities, so that they might become more culturally knowledgeable and competent with those who are different (e.g. have students interview individuals from other cultures, link students to e-mail pals from other communities).

Teachers and the school community have a responsibility to all their students to ensure that all have an equal opportunity to achieve to the best of their abilities.

References:

Link: http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf