



# Professional Practices

For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leader

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## Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

### About the Author



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The focus for this month’s *Professional Practices* is Standard 3 of the **Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**. My experiences as a teacher, principal, director, and mother have reinforced the belief that the vast majority of us in the field of educational leadership are passionately interested in improving the lives of all students in our care. So, how many of us end the week or day with, “Did I help make a difference for our students? Did I focus on what matters for their learning and their well-being?” These questions serve as guideposts, and the answer to each is hopefully a loud and resounding “YES!” Take these questions a bit deeper when considering Standard 3 and ask “Did I act with equity and cultural responsiveness towards others? ...and add...How do I know?”

We can all agree that education plays a critical role in determining how you spend your adult life; a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health, and a longer life. By the same token, the long-term social and financial costs of educational failure are high. Those without the skills to participate socially and economically generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare, and social security systems.

Every parent I know wants a better life for their children than they had, no matter what they had. They send their children to us to love, care for, respect, guide, and educate. Every child deserves our best work every day, not just our good intentions. Despite our good intentions, we have been unable to ensure that each and every child can attend a quality public school. Good intentions haven’t and won’t move the agenda forward for them, and isn’t that why we became leaders in the first place? Do we individually and collectively have the moral fortitude and commitment to serve each child and his or her future? I offer another loud and resounding “YES!”

The *Glossary of Education Reform* defines the term equity as referring to the principle of fairness. While it is often used interchangeably with the related principle of equality, equality encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programs, and strategies that may be considered fair but not necessarily equal. Consider equity as the process; equality as the outcome. Inequities occur

when biased or unfair policies, programs, practices, or situations contribute to a lack of equality in educational opportunities, performance results, and outcomes.

A 2009 McKinsey report implies that to achieve the excellence and equity in education on which our future depends, we need a system of American public



education that ensures all students have a real and meaningful opportunity to achieve rigorous college and career-ready standards. This world class education consists not only of mastery of core subjects, but training in critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as 21st century concerns like global awareness and financial literacy. Further, we cannot have a strong democracy without an informed and engaged citizenry. Accordingly, a strong public school system is essential to a strong democracy and our future as a nation.

Solving the equity challenges before us requires a high level of cultural responsiveness as listed in the **Yesterday and Today** graphic on page 5. We face challenges in our public schools to educate an enormously diverse student population in a country with rapidly changing demographics. Being responsive around issues like race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability is at the forefront.

Tillman defines culture as “a group’s individual and collective ways of thinking, believing, and knowing, which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions and behaviours.” Cultural differences constitute the essence of American society; however, all cultures are not equally regarded. It is a mistake to assume that U.S. mainstream culture is characteristic of all groups in U.S. society. Those groups that do not conform to mainstream culture or who are viewed as being outside

the mainstream assume a marginalized status and can be oppressed. Minority status is highly associated with prejudice and discrimination.

Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures. In *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*, Paula Rutherford offers insight and strategies to moving schools forward toward equity and cultural responsiveness.

When there is a cultural disconnect it often leads to poor self-concepts, discipline problems, and poor academic outcomes for ethnic minorities. Part of the problem is that teachers unfamiliar with students’ diverse backgrounds sometimes misinterpret cultural difference as misbehaviour. Several studies have established that compared with their Caucasian peers, minority students are suspended from school more frequently and for longer durations, punished more severely, and disproportionately referred for restrictive special education services.

There is, however, some good news! Research has also identified ways in which schools can serve students of color and/or poverty effectively. For example, studies from **Advancement Via Individual Determination**

## Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015

- **Mission, Vision, and Core Values**
- **Ethics and Professional Norms**
- **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**  
Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being
- **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**
- **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**
- **Community of Care and Support for Students**
- **Professional Capacity of School Personnel**
- **Professional Community for Teachers and Staff**
- **Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community**
- **Operations and Management**
- **School Improvement**



(AVID) show that rather than tracking ethnic and English language learners into low-level classes, setting high expectations and providing a scaffold of support helps students of color succeed. **AVID** is a great example of the scaffold and gives students direct instruction in which courses to take, which teachers to seek out, the importance of tests, how to study, and so on. I have observed the marked difference the use of this program can make to first generation college-bound students who didn't think college was in their future. Their lives and the lives of their families were transformed by implementing a few strategies and supports.

Another approach supported by research is creating an environment that enables teachers and students to connect with one another. For example, the Project STAR experiment in Tennessee found that students of color disproportionately benefited from reduced class size in 1st grade, and these advantages persisted over time.

The notion of fairness can be observed in very young children and has a solid footing by second grade. Adults have an enormous role in framing for children the notions of fairness, equity, and respect for cultural differences and similarities. School leaders are the examples and models for teachers and students. This appears in all we do: how we talk with others, how we listen to others, how we handle students and teachers who do not meet our expectations, how we schedule, who is included in making decisions, and who is not.

Educators are acutely aware of the achievement gaps that exist among groups of students in our schools. No matter the position you hold in your district, you must know your students, teachers, and leaders. You must believe in your capacity to teach the children who enter your doors, to lead the teachers in your school, and to guide the leaders of your district and schools. Further, you must believe in their capacity to learn at a high level given the right conditions each and every day.

With concrete ideas and a supporting body of research a 2013 report issued to then Secretary of Education Duncan, **For Each and Every Child, A Strategy for Education and Excellence** identified five strategies to improving equity:

- improving school finance and efficiency;
- providing highly qualified teachers/leaders in high

- needs schools;
- ensuring access to early childhood education;
- meeting the community needs by providing beyond-school services such as health care
- extended learning time
- realistic and aggressive governance and accountability to improve equity and excellence

I had the opportunity to participate in a seminar called “Undoing Racism” facilitated by **The Racial Equity Institute** in Greensboro, North Carolina; it may have been one of the most uncomfortable and enlightening seminars I’ve attended in a long time. A year later I’m still trying to integrate all that I learned. If you are ever presented with the opportunity to attend this or another anti-racism workshop, take advantage. It will open your eyes, touch your heart, and change your life and maybe the lives of the children in your care.



# What Does a Culturally Responsive School Look Like?

To be effective in multicultural schools and classrooms, principals and teachers must relate content to the cultural backgrounds of their students. Teaching that ignores student norms of behavior and communication provokes resistance while teaching that is responsive promotes involvement. There is growing evidence

that strong, continual engagement among diverse students requires a holistic approach where the how, what, and why of teaching and learning are unified and meaningful. Culturally responsive teaching engages intrinsic motivation and respects student's cultural identity.

## Strategy Alert: Viewing Log for Videos on Culturally Responsive Teaching

You can access seven short video clips on teaching and learning in a culturally responsive way at [www.edutopia.org/blog/five-minute-film-festival-culturally-responsive-teaching](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/five-minute-film-festival-culturally-responsive-teaching). The videos on this **Edutopia** site could be used at a faculty or principal gathering to generate conversation about the role of culture in classrooms and schools. A handy tool to use a viewing log that is designed to lead to reflection and change is the **Three-Column Chart** with column headings:

- Validations for Our Practice
- We Are Working on This
- Good Idea We Should Try

Access the Three-Column Chart template (Tool-76) at [www.justaskpublications.com/mtntemplates](http://www.justaskpublications.com/mtntemplates)

Culturally responsive teaching is a method to improving engagement and equity. Developing a framework for culturally responsive teaching and leading can be applied in all schools. Engagement is the visible outcome of motivation, the natural capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a worthy goal. Our emotions influence our motivation. Our emotions are socialized through our culture. Research shows that no one teaching strategy will consistently engage all learners. The key is helping students relate lesson content to their own backgrounds.

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. Educators should consider the following approaches multiple researchers have found representative of culturally responsive education.

- Match classroom instruction to cultural norms for social interaction to enhance students' social skills development and problem-solving ability.
- When asking questions or giving directions, adjust Wait Time for students from different cultures to enhance classroom participation and the development of critical thinking skills.
- Be sensitive to the cultural shifts that immigrant students, or other students with minority family and community cultures, must make as they move between school and home.

- Help parents gain cultural capital, that is, the skills to negotiate the education system and knowledge of the norms of behavior that govern schools.
- Use culturally responsive and respectful approaches in character education and social skill instruction.

In *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, co-authored by Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton, are exercises and conversation starters for committed groups, either just beginning or continuing the road to equity and cultural responsiveness. They write that there are four agreements for any courageous conversation:

- Stay engaged.
- Speak your truth.
- Experience discomfort.
- Expect and accept non-closure.

Singleton and Linton also relate three essential questions adapted from Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's *Understanding by Design*:

- What is it that students should know and be able to do?
- How will we know when students know it and are able to do it?
- What do we do when we discover that students don't know it and aren't yet able to do it?

They take these questions further by framing them in terms of personal and professional inquiry and action educators must consider as they think about the racial achievement gap:

- What do educators need to know and be able to do to narrow the racial achievement gap?
- How will educators know when they are experiencing success in their efforts to narrow the racial achievement gap?

- What do they do as they discover what they don't yet know and are not yet able to do to eliminate the racial achievement gap?

Saint Paul Public Schools, Minnesota, has Office of Equity. Information about that office is accessible at <http://equity.spps.org/>. Videos, images, articles, and other resources are featured there.

# Yesterday & Today

## Part III:

### Equity & Cultural Responsiveness

#### Where We've Been & Where We're Going

Treat students as groups and not as individuals

Treat each student fairly, respectfully, and with understanding of culture and context

Recognize and reward conformity among students and teachers

Recognize student's strengths, diversity, culture as assets for teaching and learning

Allow tenure to manage teaching assignments regardless of skill

Ensure each student has access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support

Implement leader-developed and leader-dependent policies on discipline

Develop policies that address misconduct in positive, fair, and unbiased manner

Identify with and support the "mainstream" practices

Confront and alter institutional biases and act with cultural competence and responsiveness

Assign students to college or vocational track early and schedule accordingly

Prepare students to live productively and contribute to diverse cultural contexts of global society

Access Yesterday & Today graphics at [www.justaskpublications.com/areas-of-focus/instructional-leadership/](http://www.justaskpublications.com/areas-of-focus/instructional-leadership/)





# Strategy Alert: School Improvement Tool Increasing Opportunities for Advanced Study

The School District of Palm Beach County, Florida, where I worked for several years, has a robust data collection system. It also has a department dedicated to helping school-based administrators understand these data and their impact on student performance. As we examined our achievement gap among and between all groups in our district, one glaring gap was that of students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Certainly, we believed that there were students who would do well in the class, given the opportunity and support. We constructed a dynamic tool that identified students who had potential for AP courses. This became known as the **AP Potential Report**. From this report, we were able to know, by name, students who had potential for AP courses and for which course they may be best suited. After meeting with families to discuss these options, Title I funds were reallocated and graduation coaches were trained and placed at selected high schools. (See layout of report at [http://www2.justaskpublications.com/AP\\_Potential](http://www2.justaskpublications.com/AP_Potential)).

I was principal of a Houston Independent School District school with high poverty and a significant bilingual program designed to serve students not proficient in English. The bilingual teachers taught parallel lessons in Spanish and English while the rest of the school received instruction in English only. After spending time in classrooms, I noticed that the gifted classrooms didn't reflect the rest of the school population. When looking at the criteria to participate in gifted classes, I found that it was biased against students with limited U.S.-based life experiences and those learning English. I knew that it wasn't possible for there to not be any gifted students among the general student body. Our leadership team wrote a waiver to be able to use alternative assessments for qualification for the gifted program. The new criteria allowed student portfolios to play a larger role and allowed for the inclusion of **The Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT)** as a nonverbal measure of K-12 general ability, including AP potential. We were able to identify more gifted bilingual students.

### Accelerated Participation in AP-RTSUA0405

School District of Palm Beach County  
Accelerated Participation in AP

Legend:   = met PSAT Standard for Probability of Success,   = met FCAT Standard for Probability of Success

• Met PSAT probability of success  
• Met FCAT success  
• Currently enrolled in the course  
• Passed the course

Student ID	Enrolled	Passed	FCAT	PSAT
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
16	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
19	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
21	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
22	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
23	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
24	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
25	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
26	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
28	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
29	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
30	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
31	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
32	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
33	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
34	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
35	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
36	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
37	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
38	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
39	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
40	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
41	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
42	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
43	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
44	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
45	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
46	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
47	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
48	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
49	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
50	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

### Accelerated Participation in AP-RTSUA0405

School District of Palm Beach County  
Accelerated Participation in AP  
Current and Potential Course Rosters

Exam Title	Course Name	Total Enrollment	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Amr/Ind	Multi-Racial	White	ATR-ELL	ATR-S/ID	FAI
Biology	Adv. Pl. Bio	22	11%	11%	11%	0%	0%	68%	0%	0%	18%
CALCULUS AB	Adv. Pl. Calculus Ab	52	2%	7%	10%	0%	2%	79%	0%	0%	20%
CALCULUS BC	Adv. Pl. Calculus Bc	22	0%	0%	9%	0%	0%	91%	0%	0%	0%
Chemistry	Adv. Pl. Chem	23	0%	0%	23%	0%	0%	62%	0%	0%	0%
English Language	Adv. Pl. Eng. Comp	25	4%	3%	17%	0%	0%	76%	0%	0%	0%
English Literature	Adv. Pl. Eng. Lit Comp	52	3%	3%	12%	0%	0%	77%	0%	2%	8%
Environmental Science	Adv. Pl. Env. Sc	22	7%	3%	16%	0%	3%	72%	0%	1%	8%
European History	Adv. Pl. Euro Hist	22	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	94%	0%	2%	2%
Human Geography	Adv. Pl. Human Geog	22	2%	4%	20%	1%	3%	70%	1%	2%	18%
Macroeconomics	Adv. Pl. Macro Econ	22	4%	4%	18%	0%	12%	59%	0%	0%	18%
Physics B	Adv. Pl. Phys B	22	4%	0%	12%	0%	0%	83%	0%	4%	8%
Psychology	Adv. Pl. Psych	128	5%	3%	17%	0%	2%	73%	0%	0%	9%

### Current and Potential Course Rosters

### Probability of Success

School District of Palm Beach County  
Accelerated Participation in AP

Exam Title: Human Geography School Year: FY2013 School: Course: Adv. Pl. Human Geog

Student Full Name	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Amr/Ind	White	ATR-ELL	ATR-S/ID	FBI	Level
1	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
3	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
6	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
7	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
8	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
10	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
11	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
12	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
13	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
14	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
15	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
16	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
17	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
18	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
19	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
20	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
21	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
22	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
23	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
24	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
25	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
26	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
27	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
28	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
29	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
30	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
31	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
32	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
33	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
34	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
35	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
36	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
37	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
38	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
39	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
40	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
41	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
42	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
43	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
44	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
45	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
46	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
47	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
48	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
49	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%
50	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12%

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