



## REPRESENTATION ACROSS THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY





Representation in school matters. Diversity of school leaders and curricula is necessary for all students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. In diverse classrooms, students are more likely to cultivate a sense of belonging and envision themselves as successful learners. Teachers of color can have strong positive impacts on children of color, but only make up one in five teachers in the workforce, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor. This is in stark contrast to children of color, who comprise more than half of K–12 public schools in the country (Irwin, et al., 2021, p. 12). Having a diverse workforce is pivotal to increasing student belonging, setting high expectations, and decreasing implicit bias. A diverse workforce provides role models for students of color and encourages them to pursue careers in education.



## Representation in the Classroom

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A classroom that represents students is one that tells their stories. Representation should be reflected not only in the makeup of the school community, but also in books, media, and curricular resources. When students of color see themselves represented in the classroom in different ways, it supports positive self-perception and allows for reflection on who they are and who they want to become (Ross, 2020). All students benefit from diversity and representation in the classroom by learning to respect and understand each other's similarities and differences.



Class environments that support a diverse group of students can make a big impact on children. Encouraging students to bring in family photos, use inclusive language, and participate in activities that reflect student interests deepens classroom connections and engagement. Naming and uplifting differences can open students and teachers up to each other's strengths and encourage a more inclusive learning environment. In order to authentically reflect student lives and cultures in the classroom, it's important to explore and honor aspects of student identities, such as:

- Race and ethnicity
- Culture
- Family structure
- Activities and sports
- Music and pop culture
- Religious or social identities

Empowering social and emotional growth through student-led conversations can create more opportunities for students to share specific parts of their identities. Honoring different identities in our school communities gives teachers opportunities to incorporate cultural references in order to boost achievement (Ross, Responsive Classroom 2020). When students are in control of their learning and sharing experiences, it not only improves student-teacher communication but can foster deeper feelings of belonging (Walton, 2021). Educators can also learn how to better respond to student needs by addressing the way they want learning environments to look and feel.



# Culturally Responsive Classrooms

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When done respectfully, assessing behavior through cultural context is what drives student-teacher connectedness and feelings of belonging. Without engaging students to put what matters to them in their own words, we make our own assumptions and judgments without realizing it.

Educators particularly need to be aware of implicit bias and continue the work of dismantling inequities that exist in classroom settings (Ferlazzo, 2020). Studies have shown that discipline in American schools is particularly punitive toward Black students, “who are seen as more culpable for their actions...than their peers of another race” (Goff et al., 2014, p. 540.) Teachers and administrators who work toward their own social and emotional learning are more likely to respond with less judgment of student behavior, set clear boundaries while maintaining respect for students, and connect in more meaningful ways.



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