

APPENDIX A

Special Considerations for Diverse Populations

Elizabeth DeFazio Rodriguez, M.S. in Ed
Michelle Levy, M. Ed in Special Education
Robin Murray, Psy.D.

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All students and staff bring to school their identities, strengths, values, lived experiences and culture. Within a school population, there may be students who feel excluded from mainstream school experiences due to social, economic, and/or cultural/religious differences. For this reason, some student groups are particularly at risk for mental health concerns due to their feelings of marginalization from the dominant school culture. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) discussions in schools are an important consideration when developing a positive and productive school climate which fosters stable mental health and wellness for all. DEI reflections bring awareness to who we are, where we came from, and our perceptions of the world. Such discussions also make us aware that one's mental health is uniquely impacted by our varying backgrounds and experiences. "It is therefore essential that culture and identity be part of the conversation as we discuss both mental health and mental health care" (NAMI, 2022). These conversations must be guided by a culturally responsive lens that critically examines how the production and dissemination of knowledge is articulated about diverse populations, as presented by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2005).

This addendum is meant to guide school communities in taking a deliberate, deeper dive as they address mental health services that reach students, staff, and caregivers who may belong to vulnerable populations. Students, staff and members of your school community may be part of, but not limited to, the following types of distinct populations:

- Racial/cultural/language differences
- LGBTQ+
- Homeless
- Special Education students
- Undocumented students
- Food insecure

As building level clinicians and other school personnel, it is our responsibility to provide culturally competent and comprehensive mental and behavioral health services that reach these populations (McClure, 2022). Regardless of the number of students/staff that may fit into any of the above categories, it is essential that all Team Members help to develop services and interventions that meet the mental health needs of these populations. Students of diverse

populations will most likely benefit from the implementation of the [Nassau County Mental Health and Wellness Strategic Plan](#) if they have the ability to view the interventions as relevant and understandable.

Interactions with students from vulnerable populations are hopefully adapted to student experiences and preferences for learning. This in turn allows for inclusive practices to then take place with respect to mental health and wellness for the staff, students, and those in the community at large.

In keeping with the *Nassau County Mental Health and Wellness Strategic Plan* as designed, cultural and inclusive practices for special populations would include:

- A. Consideration of language, lifestyle and cultural needs in ***Team Development and Leadership***
- B. Consideration of language, lifestyle and cultural differences in ***Staff Wellness and Social Emotional Literacy***
- C. Acknowledgement and adjustment for diversity, equity and inclusive practices in ***Interventions in Schools with Students***
- D. Inclusion of practices for diverse families in ***Home Engagement***
- E. Demographic considerations and engagement of diverse community members in ***Community Based Partnerships***

A. **Team Building**

In building your district and school teams, it is recommended that considerations be made to include Team Members that not only can make decisions, but that may reflect the culture, language and communication preferences of the parents, students, and community at large. For example, in a district with a large deaf community, considerations must be made to include and then accommodate the needs of this group when building your team, so that this population is appropriately represented. There may be a need for a subgroup of individuals who are knowledgeable about these needs to review and make suggestions to the group at large. Community members who speak certain languages, for example, or those who are familiar with the faith-based members of the community are important members of the team to include. There may be members of teams who cannot attend every meeting due to work obligations etc., and therefore, an “alternate” team member may have to fill in for this team member as needed. To strengthen efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, teams should include the following practices:

1. Be mindful of expenses which may be incurred to allow for the community members to attend meetings. Childcare and interpretation services for example,

should be considered before any meeting, zoom call, etc. and discussed in the individual school plans.

2. Establish the cultural validity of data: Surveys, assessments, and screening devices need to be culturally sensitive and may require translation to other languages, or may need to be explained to team members not familiar with data collection activities. Failure to do so will result in data that is not accurately reflecting the community, staff, or students.
3. Provide teams with tools to assess the extent to which equitable responsive systems and practices are in place.
4. Mental Health Teams should be working in partnership with DEI committees and staff representatives.
5. If needed, an analysis of the demographic changes within the district with respect to the infusion of certain cultures, lifestyles, and languages should be performed to ensure that the team includes a significant (rather than token) number of representatives from these groups

B. Staff Mental Wellness and Social Emotional Literacy

Building systemic SEL throughout the state will require adults who have social, emotional, cognitive, and cultural competencies themselves (adult SEL competencies), and the skills to be able to translate knowledge of SEL to effective, evidence-based implementation equitably for all students (adult capacity). SEAs can support these competencies by providing opportunities for adults to collaborate effectively with colleagues, youth, families, and communities they serve (building supporting and trusting relationships); developing and supporting adult professional learning; and creating environments that support student and adult social and emotional development (CASEL, March 2020).

Promoting staff wellness and social emotional literacy that is considerate of staff and student backgrounds, should include the following practices:

1. Professional development opportunities include diversity-rich content that is integral to the teaching of social emotional wellness. Culture, exceptionality, and language are all part of training content.
2. In order to achieve “buy in” with staff for Social Emotional Literacy, the background, culture and experiences of the staff who have not been accustomed to sharing feelings and needs with others are considered. Not all educators are comfortable with or have developed competency in the skill of navigating and expressing emotions.

3. When exploring evidenced-based practices, consider differing cultural views of mental health and how these may be embedded in staff members' cultural experiences, both positive and negative. Differing perspectives may impact the development and success of a school team and staff's success in effectively learning social emotional strategies they are asked to teach to their students.
4. School policies and practices reflect a commitment to inclusiveness, as well as respect for the values and strengths of diverse racial and ethnic groups.
5. Diversity, equity and inclusion are the characteristics we bring to developing SEL skills.
6. SEL and DEI tools complement one another to deepen educational instruction, student learning and emotional intelligence. Social Emotional Literacy serves as a framework to examine the importance of the range of human experiences, and allows us to reflect on and appreciate diversity and foster an inclusive environment.

C. Interventions in Schools with Students

From birth, we are socialized into a cultural group by our parents, families, and communities, but over time our culture changes as a result of other influences like education, income, geographic location, (and) peers. Since culture affects how we think, how we communicate, how we interpret the world, how we problem solve, how we make decisions, it should be the central component of both teaching and learning.

(Ortiz, 2014)

Children's behaviors will vary and those variations may reflect the child's cultural differences. The teacher may need to teach a student a new way of behaving or learning, but they do that without communicating to the student that their way is better than the way things are done in a child's home or community. It is important that educators provide opportunities for students to understand that different contexts have different norms and expectations for behavior and learning. and that this new context may call for a behavior that is different from the one they are normally accustomed to using. A child's ability to adapt to this new context is critical to their academic and social success. Teaching and learning are cultural acts, and so that requires that interventions be linguistically and culturally responsive.

In their efforts to develop interventions and supports that reflect inclusive practices, schools should try to incorporate the following practices:

1. While providing appropriate academic, behavioral social/emotional interventions and mental health supports, there is understanding and incorporation of the influence of culture on the student's behavior, as well as acceptance of the intervention in order to obtain the most productive responses to the intervention or support.
2. Acknowledge students' identity as a strength.
3. Consider differing cultural values and religious beliefs.
4. Be aware that parenting practices and discipline methods the student is accustomed to may be different
5. The role of family and community in the student's life may be paramount to their adjustment in certain groups and to the interventions being introduced.
6. What is expected of children at different ages may be different in different cultures and families.
7. Consider that how and when feelings are shown varies by family.
8. In education, equity can be defined as *"when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people such that each individual has access to, can meaningfully participate, and makes progress in high-quality learning experiences that empowers them towards self-determination and reduces disparities in outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities"* (Great Lakes Equity Center, 2012).
9. Screening tools are reviewed annually for sensitivity: culture, language, gender, exceptionality, internalizing/ externalizing, etc.
10. Referral documents are bilingual when appropriate.
11. Intervention teams track proportion of students from diverse populations experiencing success with an intervention or support through the disaggregation of intervention outcomes data. Data measures proportionality of outcomes for ALL students (by race, language, gender, exceptionality, etc.).
12. Assessment data are available for academic (e.g., reading, math, writing), behavioral (e.g., attendance, functional behavioral assessment, suspension/expulsion), medical, mental health, and social (including cultural congruence of student's school context) strengths/ needs across life domains where relevant.
13. Ensure that students in homeless situations have access to educational and other services that are needed to give them equal opportunity to meet the same "challenging state academic achievement standards" to which all students are held (McKinney-Vento, Assistance Act, 2008).

D. Home Engagement

There is abundant evidence in the literature that underscores the impact of engagement on achievement, graduation rates and college readiness. Students can be more successful in school settings that are culturally responsive and which create a positive environment for parent engagement. This is critical because it sets a stage of readiness for engagement that allows parents, teachers, administrators and community members to work more closely together. (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2022)

Family engagement is not about ways that families should partner with schools, but about ways that districts, schools, and educators must partner with and see families as assets for teaching and learning. Culturally responsive-sustaining family engagement is the practice of authentic, equal partnership with families, rooted in a deep knowledge and appreciation for the rich social and cultural identities, assets, habits and contexts that families bring to learning. (NYU Steinhardt, 2022)

To help schools maintain commitment to developing family and community engagement strategies, consider the following beliefs and practices:

1. View culturally and linguistically diverse families as important to the educational process.
2. Parents and caregivers are consulted with and engaged in school decisions that impact the quality of education provided.
3. Behaviors that are frequent and considered of the norm in one culture may not be viewed as such in others.
4. Schools develop protocols and supports that help all stakeholders manage conflicts related to cultural differences which may arise between a child and his/her parents and/or families and school personnel.
5. Faculty and teams respect the religious beliefs, customs, traditions, holidays, and events that are often culturally tied to a family's values and experiences. For example, important school events or assessments should not be scheduled during families' religious holidays.
6. Different ways of expressing emotions and problems or not believing in the advantages of expressing those emotions may have cultural relevance and differ between cultures.
7. Assess the family's acceptance of their child's identity.
8. There are challenges to engaging culturally, linguistically and racially diverse families in the educational experiences of their school-aged children; however, these challenges can be addressed through changes or enhancements to current school systems and policies.

9. Key strategies for promoting equity in family-school partnerships should include developing relationships, two-way home-school communication, and shared decision-making.
10. Evaluate regularly and ensure that the quality of engagement is high and focused on the anticipated positive outcomes of success for every student.
11. Carefully consider the discrepancies that may exist between the school-wide rules and expectations and what is considered socially appropriate in the student's own culture and community.
12. Efforts are made to increase positive experiences and connectedness at school for both the student and the family.

E. Community Based Partnerships

Family-school-community partnerships are a shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community agencies and organizations engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways, and families take initiative to actively support their children's development and learning. Schools and community organizations also should make efforts to listen to parents, support them, and ensure that they have the tools to be active partners in their children's school experience. Research shows that when schools, parents, families, and communities work together, students earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school and are more motivated: This is true for students of all ages, all backgrounds, and across race and ethnicity. Furthermore, a variety of supports cutting across the spectrum of social, health, and academic needs may be necessary for school success. High quality schools have demonstrated track records connecting with community resources and families to improve student outcomes in all domains of development. (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2022)

To recognize and support collaboration between school, family and community, the following beliefs and supports should be considered:

1. School teams ensure that the community members selected for inclusion and participation in the Plan reflect the community's culture and include a diverse aspect of the community such as: faith-based organizations, retail establishments frequented by both students and family members and organizations that may employ parents of students within the district.
2. External agencies develop the capacity to support students and families from multiple cultures and backgrounds.

3. When partnering with mental health agencies in the community, consider sociocultural factors, health care disparities for marginalized groups as well as family/student personal preferences related to treatment.
4. Respect cultural perceptions of mental health services. Understanding individual and cultural beliefs about mental illness is essential for the implementation of effective approaches to mental health care within the schools. Attitudes toward **mental illness** vary among individuals, families, ethnicities, **cultures**, and countries. When working with students and families from diverse social, ethnic, religious backgrounds be aware of those differences by learning about our student's backgrounds and beliefs. (Abdullah,et.al. 2011).

Conclusion

“It is imperative that the sometimes-unique mental health considerations for students of diverse backgrounds be considered in the composition of the MH Strategic Plan for it to be fully successful. Therefore, it is critical that school-based mental health providers utilize strategies to promote school climates that are safe and affirming for these students” (C. Maline, Wycoff & Turner, 2022).

This may require:

1. Data analysis of demographic changes.
2. Additional training and knowledge of needs of the districts' diverse populations including culturally responsive beliefs regarding mental health which extends to staff as well as students and community.
3. Additional meetings or subcommittees to discuss and plan for these considerations.

Resources

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