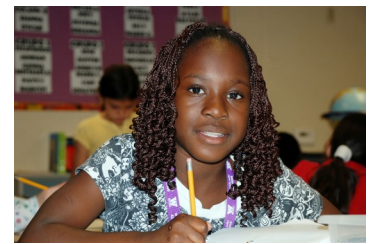


What Is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence is a professional and organizational development model designed to promote reflective, inclusive and culturally relevant practices by school professionals and school systems. As educators, we want the best for students and seek ways to meet the needs of all learners in our classrooms. We sometimes find that this requires skills and knowledge far above and beyond the content area we are teaching.



Pasco School District

Cultural competence provides a set of skills that professionals need in order to improve practice to serve all students and communicate effectively with their families. These skills enable the educator to build on the cultural and language qualities that young people bring to the classroom rather than viewing those qualities as deficits. It also allows educators to ask questions about their practice in order to successfully teach students who come from different cultural backgrounds.



Changing Student Demographics in Washington

	1998-1999	2009-2010	Net Change
All #	999,616	1,040,750	4%
White	759,708	672,350	-11%
Latino	90,965	158,612	74%
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	70,973	89,231	26%
African American	50,980	56,790	11%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	27,989	27,363	-2%
Bilingual/ English Language Learner	50,980	83,260	63%

While the white student population in Washington's public schools has declined, the population of students of color has increased by 38%.

Cultural competence is:

- Knowing the community where the school is located
- Understanding all people have a unique world view
- Using curriculum that is respectful of and relevant to the cultures represented in its student body
- Being alert to the ways that culture affects who we are
- Placing the locus of responsibility on the professional and the institution
- Examining systems, structures, policies, and practices for their impact on all students and families.

Cultural competence is not:

- Good intentions
- Cultural celebrations at designated times of the year, in designated ways
- Kumbaya diversity
- A list of stereotypes about what people from a particular cultural group do
- Assumptions that all students from one culture operate in similar ways and have had similar experiences
- The responsibility of children, their parents or the community
- Color-blindness (treating everybody the same)

Effective Cultural Competence Training

Here are some questions to consider when selecting cultural competence training

Is the training part of an ongoing process?

A person or organization can never become certifiably and completely culturally competent. Cultural competence is a continuum.

Avoid trainers who do not ask what you have already done or who claim they have all the answers. Cultural competence is not a requirement that can be checked off.

Does the training meet my school's needs?

Look for a trainer with a depth of experience with educators and the education system and who understands your community. A good trainer will want to learn more about your school's needs in advance.

Avoid canned presentations or trainings designed to push a particular product or agenda.



Is the trainer qualified?

Ask the provider about the background that provides her the knowledge and skills to provide cultural competence training. Ask about evaluations that she has received from previous trainings.

Does the training start with self-awareness and reflection?

We need to understand ourselves before we can understand others. The training should ask people to confront the biases and assumptions they have about the different cultural groups with whom they work, and help them work through these biases.

Avoid training that gives the impression that cultural competence is easy, as it is a process that should cause you to challenge your thoughts and practices.

Does the training provide practical applications to the classroom and the institution?

The training will be most effective if it provides a direct link to student learning and is grounded in principles of civil rights and equity. Participants may also gain cross-cultural communication skills and tangible ways to develop family, school, community family-school-community partnerships.

Avoid trainings that claims it provides the solutions for specific groups, since these usually do not recognize the diversity within groups and may perpetuate stereotypes.

Cultural Competence and the Student, Family, and Community

Understand the process of language acquisition.

The student speaks enough English for basic communication. He is not able to use the more advanced grammatical structures

Know the community you are serving.

This basic understanding of how the culture is organized improved communication and partnerships with this community in this district.

Recognize the student's culture as a strength.

The teacher recognizes that the student is speaking from previous knowledge from his culture's creation story, which included the material of the earth coming from the ocean floor. Students may have gained their knowledge from different sources, such as books, family, television or previous classes.

Acknowledge the diversity of messages in non-verbal communications

Don't assume that respect is communicated in the same way in all cultures. The meaning of non-verbal communications such as eye contact, punctuality, volume of voice and hand gestures may vary from culture to culture.



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