



Guide to Integrating Culturally Inclusive and Equitable Supports in the Classroom

Students experiencing significant distress or mental health conditions often benefit from equitable supports in the classroom. Here are some steps to provide equitable supports in the classroom:

1. Form a collaborative relationship with the student and their family as well as the child's therapist and special educators, if applicable.
 - Things to consider: Who should be invited on the team? What will you do to ensure all relevant team members are involved in all meetings?

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2. Meet as a team to establish a student support plan that can be informed by the student's 504 plan or Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, if applicable.
 - Things to consider: Check in with the family to determine their scheduling preferences.

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3. Ensure equity of voice on the team by respecting the youth and the family as the expert on what the child needs.
 - Things to consider: Consider having a stated ground rule that youth and families get to speak first and respond first to questions, and that all meetings will close with an opportunity for the youth and family to say any additional comments and/or ask additional questions.

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4. Avoid labeling students by their diagnoses or problems. Rather, focus on setting positive behavioral goals (i.e., behaviors that the team wants the child to demonstrate), that are developmentally and culturally appropriate.
 - Things to consider: Mental health professionals, like a school social worker or psychologist, can help determine what is developmentally appropriate based on the student's age and developmental abilities. Defer to families to understand what is culturally appropriate behavior.

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5. Identify how educators will reinforce positive behaviors.
 - Things to consider: Avoid the trap of focusing on what the child should not do, because this sets the teacher up as a disciplinarian, constantly looking out for the bad. This dynamic undermines the child's strengths, can block progress, and harm the student-teacher relationship.

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6. Finally, continuously assess how things are going and adapt the plan as needed. Use a feedback process that considers youth and family needs and abilities and prioritize youth and family feedback when modifying the plan.
 - Things to consider: Consider setting a plan for how often you will ask for feedback from the team, including youth and families. Would quarterly, each semester, yearly, or some other feedback schedule work best for the team?

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