

# Valuing Cultural Norms That Differ From Your Own

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**Black History Month** is an opportunity for us as educators not only to teach students about historic contributors to our American history, but also to help students experience and find value in different cultures. This important work of raising awareness and appreciation shouldn't be confined to one month; rather, we can use this month to help fill in the gaps in students' knowledge and remove misunderstandings in order to strengthen their appreciation of our diverse American culture and build lasting relationships in our schools and communities.

## Tips for Celebrating Cultural Diversity

This important work starts with us: our openness to noticing differences and appreciating unique values is critical to creating a positive and inclusive learning community. Keep in mind the following as you look to value cultural norms in your classroom:

- 1. Be aware of your own implicit cultural bias.** We all have some implicit bias, which can cause us to think of differences as deficits. This can result in our assuming that our own beliefs and practices are the “right way.” Acknowledge this bias and view differences as just that: different ways of looking at and being in the world, not problems or flaws.
- 2. Think broadly about diversity.** Every person has a culture. In many ways, it is our culture that makes us who we are. Celebrating this fact encourages students to embrace their uniqueness within the school community and view it as a strength.
- 3. Learn about students' cultures.** Learn as much as you can about students and their families—their communication norms, values related to learning, cultural learning styles, etc.—to appreciate and understand their expectations for interactions and learning.
- 4. Use culturally relevant teaching practices.** Culturally relevant practices include hands-on learning, social learning, and use of stories. *Responsive Classroom* practices such as interactive learning structures and role-play involve visible models of social and academic structures that emphasize student voice and participation. Similarly, *Responsive Classroom* practices such as Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory Meeting provide a structured setting for students to share about themselves.
- 5. Look to students' families as resources.** Connecting with families and treating them as valued partners in students' education is essential to learning. To help build positive relationships, value families' contributions and assume that every parent and guardian cares deeply about their child's education.

Acknowledging and embracing the cultural uniqueness of your students and families can be one of the most important and most rewarding steps you take as an educator. When students feel known, they feel valued, which is fundamental to our vision of bringing hope and joy to every student in every school, every day.