

DIVERSE LEARNERS

SUMMER 2019 | BRIEF 1

WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

Many of Oklahoma's nearly 700,000 public school students can be considered diverse learners. This group includes many different abilities, races, ethnicities, cultures, economic situations, native languages and backgrounds. Oklahoma's student population is more diverse than ever before. Students of color have been the majority population in our public schools for the past few years, a trend that is expected to continue.

In a classroom of 24 students, 40 to 50 percent – or 10 to 12 students – can be considered diverse learners. A wide range of students – including those who have been bullied, are living in poverty, have a learning difference or disability, are gifted and talented or have experienced poverty – represent the diverse learners in our classrooms. Oklahoma educators have opportunities to recognize, accommodate and value diverse learners. We recognize that these students enrich our lives and broaden our perspectives. Each deserves a personalized approach to learning in an environment of mutual trust.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Without changes, the social and economic disparities and achievement gaps of students who are underserved will persist and grow, and we will be at risk of marginalizing greater numbers of students.
- Students of color, low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, homeless students and students in foster care are less likely to succeed in math and reading and less likely to graduate.
- To close the achievement gap, rather than treating all students the same, teachers should differentiate instruction to advance educational equity.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Educational research identifies key evidence-based strategies for working with diverse learners and closing achievement gaps that exist within race/ethnicity, socioeconomics, language and disability.

- Hold consistent and high expectations for all learners and respect each student's intelligence and individuality.
- Implement culturally relevant instruction that honors each student's background and life experience and adapts to meet the diverse learning needs of students.
- Establish authentic and caring relationships with students.
- Develop effective family and community involvement.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can educators build a learning culture that adapts to diverse learner needs?
- In what ways can educators collaborate to provide greater equity?
- What strategies and practices can educators use to develop relationships with families and community?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

- Value each student as an individual with unique identities and needs.
- Recognize and address the needs of students in poverty.
- Provide social, emotional and academic supports for racial and cultural diversity.
- Respond to racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity to maximize learning for all students.
- Recognize the “indigenous ways of knowing” of many American Indian students and respect their cultural values as tribal citizens.
- Acknowledge and support the unique needs of gifted and talented students and differentiate their academic, social and emotional learning.
- Meet the needs of students with disabilities and ensure they have access to general education curriculum.
- Identify English learners and support language acquisition while ensuring access to general education curriculum.
- Engage families and community, beginning with our youngest learners.

