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.
WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

American Indian students represent 13.5% of the Oklahoma student population. There is no simple characterization of a “typical” American Indian student. More than 70% of school districts are located within one of the 39 sovereign Tribal Nations.

American Indian students are likely to have multiple tribal affiliations (i.e., Choctaw, Comanche and Pawnee). Federal law only recognizes American Indian people for citizenship and enrollment in one Tribal Nation despite multiple affiliations.

Click here to view a map of the 39 Oklahoma Tribal Jurisdictions.

WHY IT MATTERS

• There are approximately 130,000 American Indian students enrolled in Oklahoma public schools.

• 92% of Oklahoma American Indian students are enrolled in public schools, while only 8% are enrolled in Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools.

• 8.7% of American Indian children in Oklahoma are age 5 and under.

• 46% of American Indian students attend rural schools.

• Nearly 50% of 4th- and 8th-grade American Indian students have never been exposed to their own Native language in local school curriculum.

• Oklahoma American Indian students consistently outperform their American Indian peers in other states.
THINGS TO CONSIDER

• Create an authentic relationship. Learn about tribal affiliations, including the one in which your students are citizens.

• Give your American Indian students time to reflect during time-sensitive tasks. For shy students, consider pre-planning so the student can take on a leadership role.

• Be sure to share praise with students’ parents and grandparents. Learn about students’ home life to identify their cultural role models.

• Support the cultural identities of American Indian students by appropriately addressing them. All American Indian peoples are not the same. Embrace uniqueness.

Source: Effective Strategies to Engage Native American Students

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

• How many different American Indian affiliations do I currently teach?

• How do I know who/what tribal educational programs are available to my school district from the local Tribal Nation?

• How am I empowering American Indian students by strengthening their cultural identity without making them feel pressured to be a cultural expert?

• When using visual representations of American Indian identities, do I make the mistake of using old “static” representations versus more contemporary ones?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

To adequately serve American Indian students with culturally responsive and equitable instruction, consider using the following resources below:

• Native Knowledge: Culture Is Not a Costume
  Source: OKC Public Schools, Native American Student Services

• Make Native American Heritage Month a Success
  Source: OSDE, EngageOK Teachers Newsletter October 2018

• Reclaiming Native Truth: Guide for Allies
  Source: Illuminative Project, Nonprofit Corporation

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WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood years as birth through age 8. Typically associated with Pre-Kindergarten and kindergarten, early childhood spans from PK-3rd grade in public schools. Children’s brains develop more rapidly from birth to age eight than at any other point in their lives, making these years critical. The foundations for their social skills, self-esteem, perception of the world and moral outlook are established during these years, as are their cognitive skills. Oklahoma’s early childhood classrooms are committed to providing all children access to developmentally appropriate classrooms so they can attain the academic and personal skills they need to be academically successful.

SoonerStart provides preschool special education services to students birth to three years of age. In 2018, SoonerStart served 13,015 children, 5,558 of whom received services through an Individualized Family Service Plan.

In Oklahoma, academic standards are vertically aligned PK-12, and Family Guides are available PK-6 to help families ensure learning continues at home.

WHY IT MATTERS

OKLAHOMA PRE-K
• 74% of students are enrolled in Pre-K.
• 99.4% of Oklahoma school districts report offering Pre-K.
• 39,807 students are enrolled in Pre-K.
• 87% of students enrolled in Pre-K are full day and 13% are enrolled in half day.
• 127 districts collaborate to offer Public Pre-K.
• 2,210 educators teach Pre-K in Oklahoma.

OKLAHOMA KINDERGARTEN
• 52,515 students are enrolled in kindergarten.
• 2,902 educators teach kindergarten in Oklahoma. Oklahoma has 51,997 first-grade students, 50,453 second grade students and 51,839 third-grade students.
THINGS TO CONSIDER

3 Core Considerations for early childhood teachers are:

- Know child development and learning. Understanding typical development and learning at different ages is a crucial starting point.
- Know what is individually appropriate. Continually observe children's play and interaction with the physical environment and others to learn about each child's interests, abilities and developmental progress.
- Know what is culturally important. Children’s families, values and expectations are factors that shape their lives at home and in their communities.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can you champion the importance of daily “play” in children’s learning and development?
- How can you be an instructional champion for all young learners, regardless of ability?
- How can you champion welcoming school environments that create clear and open communication for all families?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Practices in early childhood programs should promote equity and foster open communication with and between families in the early childhood setting. Oklahoma’s Pre-K is funded as a grade level. Oklahoma Pre-K teachers are certified teachers with bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education. High-quality early education improves outcomes, narrows achievement gaps and conveys long-term benefits for children in school and life.

Equitable early childhood education is achieved when we:

- Focus on children’s strengths.
- Value and honor families as children’s first teachers.
- Assess children in authentic ways.
- Recognize and address differences among children and students of all abilities.
- Promote play to develop strong language skills, creativity, social intelligence and confidence.
- Create a climate and culture conducive to learning by fostering social and emotional skills, attitudes and behaviors.
WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

English learners (ELs) are a diverse group of students representing different languages, cultures, ethnicities, learning abilities and nationalities. Oklahoma has more Hispanic and Latino students than any other language group, and aside from English, Spanish is the most commonly spoken language in the state.

It is difficult for ELs to learn classroom material at the same time they are learning English as a second language. A basic understanding of conversational English is not enough for students whose native language is other than English; all students deserve an academic background that equips them for a successful future.

Despite the difficulty ELs face in navigating school while learning a new language, they are a tremendous asset when their academic potential is unlocked. In fact, research shows that former ELs who have become proficient in English and become bilingual or multilingual outperform all other student groups on every academic measure.

WHY IT MATTERS

- English learners and former ELs make up 12 percent of Oklahoma’s student population.
- Spanish is the largest language group, spoken by 78 percent of Oklahoma ELs.
- Other prominent language groups in Oklahoma include Cherokee, Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, Marshallese, Arabic and Zomi.
- Of Oklahoma’s approximately 540 districts, 311 serve English learners.
- Approximately 73 percent of EL students in the state are served within the state’s two major metro areas.
- 54,033 Oklahoma students identified as English learners in spring 2019.
THINGS TO CONSIDER

- **Recognize** that second language acquisition is a gradual developmental process and is built on students’ knowledge and skill in their native language.

- **Provide** authentic opportunities to use language in a nonthreatening environment.

- **Encourage** students to read in their native language. Strong native language reading skills lift achievement in English acquisition.

- **Foster** English language acquisition and whole-class engagement by using dramatic techniques in their instruction practice.

- **Use** “language buddies” to pair an EL student with a classmate who is proficient in both English and the EL’s first language.

- **Become** familiar with students’ cultural heritage and norms. This will foster mutual trust and understanding.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are effective strategies implemented in your school to support ELs?

- How does your school develop authentic performance tasks that connect to students’ cultural backgrounds, interests and prior knowledge?

- Does your school understand differences in the communication and cognitive styles of various cultures and what these mean for student participation?

- How does your school involve families of English learners to support their education?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

- Recognize that educating English learners is the responsibility of the entire school and staff.

- Adapt curriculum to utilize students’ languages and cultures as a resource for further learning.

- Hold high expectations for all English learners.
WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

Gifted and talented students are identified at the preschool, elementary and secondary level as students who have potential high academic capabilities and need differentiated or accelerated education or services.

In order to ensure all student populations have the opportunity for gifted and talented services, Oklahoma has established guidelines for identification. There are two ways for school districts to identify gifted students:

- **Category 1** – Students who score in the top 3% on any national standardized assessment of intellectual ability.

- **Category 2** – Students who excel in one or more of the following areas: creative thinking, leadership, visual or performing arts and specific academic ability as identified through a multicriteria process.

Gifted education in Oklahoma is mandated by state law. Each district is required to identify and serve their gifted population and must maintain an updated Gifted Education Plan.

WHY IT MATTERS

As Oklahoma’s student population grows more diverse, it is important to find ways to ensure access and opportunity are available to all students.

**Oklahoma Gifted Student Demographic Data for 2018-19:**

- 95,078 were identified and served.
- 38,162 were identified in the top 3%.
- 56,884 were identified by multiple criteria.
- 2,167 had disabilities.
- 11,885 were American Indian or Alaskan Native.
- 3,569 were Asian.
- 3,822 were African American.
- 184 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
- 55,245 were White.
- 9,046 were Multi-racial.
THINGS TO CONSIDER

As a result of intellectual and social differences, gifted students face unique challenges.

Underachievers are students who have a large gap between their potential and their performance.

Perfectionists are students who have a desire to please others while having difficulty setting realistic goals, which causes stress, procrastination or even illness.

Twice-Exceptional Students are high-ability children who also have conditions that interfere with their ability to learn (e.g., learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, etc.) Educators must recognize and accommodate both exceptionalities.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

• How are you meeting the needs of your gifted students?

• How do you inform teachers so they are aware of how gifted students are identified within your district?

• How do you involve the families of your gifted population to support their education outside the classroom?

• How do you involve families of your yet-to-be identified gifted population to raise awareness of giftedness?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Appropriate programming for gifted and talented students includes options for curricular and social-emotional modifications designed to meet the individual needs of gifted students. The goal is to provide challenging educational experiences for our gifted students through acceleration and/or enrichment opportunities.

**Acceleration**

Cluster grouping
Proficiency-based promotion
Honors, AP and IB courses
Concurrent enrollment
Accelerating in specific content

**Enrichment**

Within the regular classroom
Creative and academic contests
Differentiated curriculum
Mentorships
Pull-out programs

To create more equitable practices for gifted students, it is important to provide extensive training to teachers so they can know the latest educational research, resources, instructional strategies and practices available. Quality instruction develops critical and creative thinking.
WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

A student with a disability who qualifies for special education and related services is a diverse learner who:

- Has a documented disability under one of the categories as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education act (IDEA): intellectual disability; hearing impairment (including deafness); speech or language impairment; visual impairment (including blindness); serious emotional disturbance; orthopedic impairment; autism; traumatic brain injury; other health impairment; specific learning disability; deaf-blindness and/or multiple disabilities.

- Has a disability that has an adverse impact on the student’s educational performance in academic and nonacademic areas.

- Needs special education services.

Students with disabilities are entitled to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). IDEA states that, to the maximum extent appropriate, all students with disabilities (ages 3-21) are to be educated with age appropriate peers, both with and without disabilities. This is known as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The LRE is the appropriate balance of settings and services to meet the student’s individual needs.

WHY IT MATTERS

- In Oklahoma, approximately 16% of all students in public schools are receiving special education services.

- 72% of the students in special education spend more than 80% of their time in the general education classroom.

- 37% of students in special education have a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), a category that includes dyslexia, brain injury, etc.

- 17% of students in special education have an Other Health Impairment (OHI), a category that includes diabetes, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, asthma and more.

- 6% of students in special education have autism.
THINGS TO CONSIDER

A variety of strategies can support students with disabilities in the classroom. These may include the following:

- **Build relationships** with your students and provide a safe and supportive environment for learning.
- Provide high-quality instruction.
- Establish consistent and **high expectations** for all students.
- Adjust instruction based on the individual needs of students.
- Implement **accommodations and modifications** indicated in the IEP.
- Ensure access to assistive technology.
- **Focus on student’s strengths** instead of deficits.
- Understand trauma-informed instructional practices.
- Use Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do you **contribute** to the development of the IEPs of your students?
- How do you **involve the families** of your students with disabilities to support their education inside and outside of classroom?
- How will you **support** your students who have experienced trauma?
- What services and educational setting options are available in your district to meet the individual LRE needs of each student?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

IEP teams must develop a high-quality and individualized IEP based on the child’s needs. To meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable academic appropriate progress in light of the child’s circumstances. The IEP must contain appropriately ambitious goals. If a child with a disability is not making meaningful progress toward goals, the IEP team must meet to determine what additional supports may be required.