# PATHWAY FOUR: RESPECTING DIVERSITY

Respecting diversity is vital to creating rich learning experiences and welcoming environments in which all children and their families are valued and supported. Awareness of diversity and developing appropriate responses to the various types of diversity is needed to successfully identify and connect to the resources that exist in the communities, families, and schools served by Community-District Teams (Team). This Pathway is key to developing a foundation of informed and sustainable responses to diversity and is important in building inclusive, involved, and caring Ready Schools and communities.

> I f we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.
>
> -Margaret Mead,
> Cultural Anthropologist

## Key Understandings

The demographic composition of the U.S. is changing rapidly. By 2050, researchers predict that nearly half of the population will be comprised of people reflecting a host of cultural, linguistic, racial, religious, and ethnic diversity.

Diversity in schools and communities encompasses all of the ways that we human beings are both similar and different from each other across a range of dimensions. To be respectful of the diversity present in a community, Ready Schools efforts should incorporate the following key understandings and actions:

➤ Define diversity as extending beyond race: it is for all students, not just students of color (Nieto, 1996).

➤ Possess a working knowledge of the kind of diversity that exists in local communities and schools.

➤ Believe that everyone needs to share information, be recognized, valued, and understood. This will increase participation as well as strengthen schools and the community.

➤ Communicate that bringing people together will increase communication and understandings.

➤ Understand that diversity is enriching and frame diversity as an asset.

➤ Celebrate both commonalities and differences.

➤ Increase teacher, administrator, peer, family, and community sensitivity to diversity.

➤ Facilitate schools, families, and communities working as collaborators and co-learners on the topic of diversity.

➤ Incorporate insights from research on the "cultural learning style" of children and families.

➤ Address the needs of all children across a range of learning styles and physcial and cognitive abilities.

### Dimensions of Diversity

- Class
- Language
- Ability
- Race
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Family Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Education Background

# The Work

The objective for Community-District Teams is to develop inclusive environments that demonstrate a respect for and deep understanding of family, school, and community stakeholder diversity. A welcoming learning environment is achieved when instructional practices, displays, curricula, materials (books, toys, etc.), celebrations, and assessments are reflective of a community's diversity.

Community-District Teams nurture sustainable community-home-school connections by engaging community-based early education programs, PreK centers, schools, district, families, and communities in preparing children for lives in a complex, multicultural society. This work involves several key elements:

Community-District Teams gain knowledge about the kinds of diversity that exists in the schools and communities they serve and use it to develop engaged, inclusive communities, districts, and schools.

- Efforts are regularly made to engage and accommodate diverse family structures (for example, low income, non-native English speakers, immigrant, single-parent, same-sex parents, or families with cognitive or physical challenges) in activities, meetings, and decision-making in places and ways that demonstrate awareness and respect.

Community-District Teams model the creation of welcoming environments in schools and communities by reflecting the cultural makeup and other diversity of the community in Team membership.

- Develop a system for recruiting and retaining members that are widely representative of the entire community, not just the dominant community.

- Recruit members that are culturally competent and conscious of diversity issues. They are able to understand the experiences of the groups they communicate with and serve.

- Community-District Teams should be respectful and responsive in their words and actions. One Team member reminds us that creating a welcoming environment is more than just a head count.

Community-District Teams create regular opportunities for dialogue, professional development, and resource-sharing held at various, accessible community and school sites.



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Eileen Kugler, author of *Debunking the Middle Class Myth*, describes the benefits and crucial nature of promoting, creating, and sustaining diverse, inclusive schools for students, communities, and the work force.

Students who go to diverse, inclusive schools learn 21st Century Skills:

- ☑ They think more deeply and question more.
- ☑ They are better problem solvers.
- ☑ They know how to work in diverse teams.
- ☑ They recognize different strengths in their peers.

Our diverse communities are vibrant and strong:

- ☑ Diverse neighbors bring new insights and perspectives.
- ☑ We all benefit from a broader range of skills.
- ☑ We can grow beyond our own experiences.

Our diverse workplaces are dynamic and forward-thinking:

- ☑ Different skills lead to a stronger whole.
- ☑ Wide-ranging insights solve problems rapidly.
- ☑ Ideas from different cultures, different generations, different races increase opportunities.

# Who is Involved: Why and What are Their Roles?

As with other Pathways, the success of a Team's efforts is dependent upon those involved. Ideally, Community-District Teams should include teachers, administrators, early childhood professionals, teacher assistants, and a wide range of members of the community (e.g., family members, business members, service providers for families and children, healthcare professionals, homeless services representatives, faith-based and community group leaders, etc.).

**Families**: Families provide information to Teams and share feedback on Team progress as it is perceived by families and the larger community. Families may serve as liaisons, community ambassadors, and advocates for their children and other, less vocal families and community members. As trust is built, families become an important source of information on community matters and important resources in creating inclusive schools. Families can share their own experiences and knowledge to assist in planning events to attract and include diverse families.

**Educators**: From early childhood professionals to K-3 teachers and teaching assistants to principals and district personnel, all educators are vital to developing a sustainable framework for respecting diversity through awareness and acknowledgement of diversity and working to build trust within the community. Educators can serve as curriculum and policy advocates for inclusive schools, but they must be willing to examine their instructional practices and materials for bias, and work to build resources that reflect the cultural backgrounds of their students and families. Educators must also work to build a respectful relationship with parents and caregivers. There is no substitute for simply reaching out to families and being accessible to increase family and community involvement in the learning environment. While the aforementioned roles are crucial to creating and sustaining inclusive schools, the role of educators as it relates to the Community-District Team is to engage in two-way communication informing the Team of areas related to respecting diversity that require additional support district-wide and providing the Team with feedback as to how their Ready Schools work impacts educators district-wide.

**Community**: Community is a broad category that may include community and service organizations (i.e., social services, healthcare, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, mental health, immigrant services, disability services, homeless services, etc.), local businesses, and the faith community. These parties can serve as bridge-builders and community ambassadors who provide support and services to children and their families. Thanks to their direct connections to and work with various parts of the community, they possess valuable information about specific interests, needs, and concerns of different segments of the community. This information will be very helpful to the Community-District Team as they plan and carry out their Ready Schools efforts.

**University Liaisons**: University faculty in Social Work and Education, for example, can help Community-District Teams develop effective assessments, provide professional development and materials to facilitate work with diverse groups, and build cultural competence strategies for creating authentic relationships with and welcoming environments for children and their families.

# Sustainability

In order to create sustainable, inclusive environments respecting and affirming diversity, we must go beyond simply celebrating "heroes and holidays" (Lee et al., 1998). In general, we need to study ourselves and our society to understand how we truly define differences and include or exclude groups and individuals according to those differences. Planning for sustainability requires collaboration with families, faith, business, education, service, commerce, and nonprofit organizations and stepping outside of our comfort zone and home community. A true sense of belonging and membership must be shared among group members and all members should have a voice in decision making.

### Recruitment and Retention

A Team member recruitment and retention plan is essential to sustainability. The goal of this plan should be to recruit members who are representative of the whole community. (Refer to Family, School, Community Partnerships and Engaging Environments Pathways for more information.) Embedded in recruitment is a plan for retention. Some retention strategies might be flexibility in meeting times and locations to bolster diverse representation at meetings, ground rules for ensuring that all have a voice at the table, and creating welcoming environments by making sure minority/ underrepresented members interact with others with similar experiences. Avoid tokenism; having one member of a particular group does not necessarily mean diverse representation. Develop strategies that take turnover into account, while maintaining diverse representation.

### Shared Vision and Shared Language

Developing a shared vision is different than having the same vision. A shared vision is more complex and reflective of the diverse voices that shape it. It is supported and sustained by a shared language and understanding for what diversity means and why it is important. There should be a plan in place for communicating to stakeholders how advocating for and respecting diversity is beneficial to all. A shared language is developed through training, interaction with diverse constituencies, and on-going dialogue and communication. Creating a shared vision and language is an important step in creating a welcoming atmosphere for families and children and building trust among stakeholders. Make use of parent liaisons; ESL professionals; and local social, recreational, health, and government agencies to communicate this vision and ensure that it is inclusive and able to sustain itself beyond the Community-District Team.

### Training and Professional Development

A foundation of open dialogue and a willingness to take part in honest conversations about difficult topics is essential in this Pathway. Issues of racism and discrimination of any kind must be addressed in ways that honor where people are in the conversation. Some introductory diversity and cross-cultural communication training may be needed to enhance individual comfort and knowledge levels as well as to provide strategies for engaging in open, meaningful dialogue. Hands-on, participatory learning activities are useful for diversity training. Workshops might include ice-breakers in cross-cultural communication and simulation games like poverty simulations (see the Missouri Community Action

Coalition in Appendix E, Resources for Pathway Four: Respecting Diversity). Additional strategies include disability simulations and a variety of role-plays, lessons, activities, and discussions that explore other diversity dimensions (e.g., culture, class, race, languages, etc.), biases, and stereotypes.

Coaching, mentoring, community volunteering, inquiry teams, and visitations to other schools and PreK centers are great sources for diversity training and application. Adult Learning Communities (ALCs) that include representation from families, community organizations and services, schools, and PreK and early childhood professionals offer opportunities to share ideas, hear different perspectives, and nurture a culture of dialogue and problem-solving while cultivating leadership through shared power. It is best to host ALCs in multiple sites that allow for greater representation and convenience for stakeholders.

## On-Going Assessment and Data Collection

Assessment and data collection are essential for planning and sustainability.  Using assessment and data collection as a learning tool promotes informed risk-taking and the perspective that failure presents an opportunity for growth. Reflection on data helps build capacity; is useful in gauging the Team's effectiveness in addressing the needs and preferences of diverse groups; assists in strategic planning for developing short- and long-term goals, events, and policies and practices; and is invaluable in determining individual and organizational strengths and areas in need of growth. Teams might collect data using the following tools: self-assessments for cultural competence and diversity awareness, organizational and school assessments, and on-going school and community mapping surveys of children and families to understand resources, diversity, and needs of families and communities.

## Building Community

Develop partnerships with community members, organizations, and businesses to provide time, materials, and social and emotional support for students, families, and teachers. Community-District Teams also plan or participate in events with local community groups that serve diverse populations.
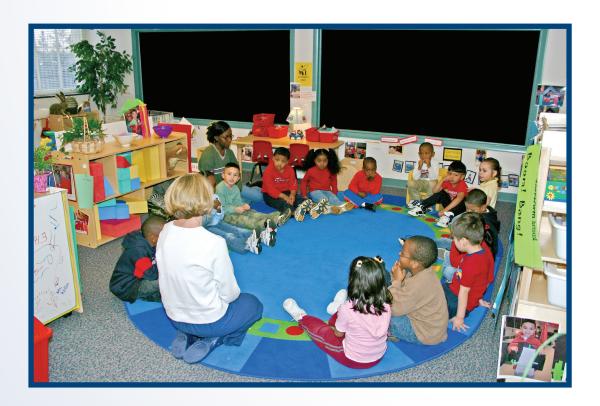
Community-District Teams conduct on-going asset mapping and surveying processes that focus on both the resources and diversity present in the community and that involve faith, business, education, commerce, and nonprofit groups. Asset mapping is based on the principle that a community can be built by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens and associations that call a neighborhood or community home (see Appendix E, Resources for Pathway Four: Respecting Diversity). As described by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), there are three levels of assets to be considered. The first is the "gifts, skills, and capacities" of the individuals living in the community. The second level of assets includes "citizen associations" through which local people come together to pursue common goals. The third level of assets is those institutions present in community, such as local government, hospitals, education, and human service agencies.

## Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look

A first step for Community-District Teams is to determine what challenges the Team faces in addressing diversity as part of their work. Additional questions might examine the ways the Team supports various aspects of advocating for and respecting diversity and include:

1. Do the Team members reflect the racial, ethnic, economic, linguistic, cultural, ability, and sexual orientation diversity present in the community?

2. Are translators available in schools, early childhood, and community settings as needed?

3. Are there professional development opportunities related to working with children from economically, racially, and linguistically and academically diverse populations?

4. Does the Team have members who are culturally competent and knowledgeable about diversity issues in the community?

5. Does the Team establish relationships with organizations that serve diverse populations?

6. Does the Team advocate for curriculum that integrates the knowledge and traditions of diverse cultures and families and that is not stereotypical?

7. Does the Team advocate for materials (i.e., books, displays, activities) representative of the community's diversity in terms of class, ethnicity, language, ability, race, etc.?

8. Are there opportunities for open and honest dialogue about diversity in your community?

## Taking Action

### Key Strategies

- Teams can share understandings, definitions, language, and frameworks for discussing and celebrating diversity.

- Teams can engage in community-based outreach to diverse groups.

- Teams can develop collaborative relationships with community organizations and businesses to create and provide resources and technical assistance to support inclusive practices.

- Teams can advocate for meaningful professional development focusing on key aspects of diversity—socioeconomic status (poverty), language, ability, culture, race, and sexual orientation—along with on-going and supportive follow-up.

- Teams can conduct community forums to promote on-going dialogue and exchange between the Community-District Team and stakeholders.

- Teams can partner with local organizations that serve children and their families.

- Teams can develop a framework for creating inclusive school districts where families feel welcomed, valued, and acknowledged.

- Teams can address community beliefs and actions that unintentionally segregate schools.

- Teams can evaluate materials for their inclusiveness and cultural relevance.

- Teams can help students, families, teachers, and administrators understand and relate to the histories, cultures, and languages of people different from themselves (Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

- Team members can attend community-based events held by various organizations serving different groups.

- Teams can invite community and business members to facilitate a discussion on a diversity-related topic and/or host informal book clubs.

- Teams can hold or facilitate a cultural celebration inviting family members and/or community organizations to a family-community heritage event where participants bring food and share (or listen to) stories about unique family and cultural traditions.

### Beginning Steps in Respecting Diversity

There is only one child in the world and that child's name is ALL children

—Carl Sandburg

*Get Yourself Out There*

☑ Attend Events/Meetings for and by Diverse Groups

*Ensure You Represent Diversity*

☑ Invite Diverse Representatives to the Table

*Assess Your Beliefs/Biases*

☑ Take a Self-Assessment, Read, Build a Critical Friends Group

# Issues/Challenges/Barriers

While trends in communities are unintentionally (and sometimes intentionally) creating segregated schools; families, districts, and communities are missing out on the benefits of inclusive, diverse school settings. One challenge for the Community-District Team is to advocate for the development and/or maintenance of inclusive, diverse schools by tackling deeply held beliefs that can undermine Team efforts.

One Community-District Team described a trend occurring in their school district that they referred to as "white flight." The situation was described by the Team member:

> There was a school that had a student population that was about half African American and half Caucasian and then experienced a population influx of Latino families. As the student population increased in diversity, a high percentage of the Caucasian students and a moderate percentage of the African American students left the school and enrolled in a newly formed charter school in the community. Subsequently, the original schools' population went from being half African American and half Caucasian to being half African American and half Latino. In addition, student achievement on accountability tests decreased and family involvement declined.

If your Community-District Team encounters barriers to respecting diversity, you are not alone. Several sites across North Carolina requested professional development and technical support in order to address diversity with Community-District Team members, School-Based Teams, families, schools, and the community. Poverty as a barrier was frequently mentioned. One site stated that schools from different ends of the socioeconomic status spectrum do not want to collaborate with each other. Another reported a need for professional development to increase an understanding of poverty. A third reported that generational poverty creates a barrier to reaching some parents. And, a fourth was interested in including a poverty simulation during their professional development initiative dedicated to early childhood education. However, addressing poverty alone will not remove all barriers to respecting diversity; it is important to explore underlying beliefs related to all dimensions of diversity. Ignoring barriers to respecting diversity will make it even more difficult to Explore the following possible barriers to determine ways in which Teams can address the Respecting Diversity Pathway to make real improvements resulting in positive outcomes for children, families, schools, and the community.

> ‣ Historical or emerging cultural divisions within the community:
>   » Understand the contexts. Why do these divisions exist? What is the history? Where are areas of difference? Where are points of connection and shared experience?
>   » Collaborate with other community agencies and organizations that serve various parts of the community (e.g., one that works with students with special needs or non-native English speakers) as a way to make connections as well as expand and share resources, ideas, and information.
>   » There is no substitute for getting into the community and meeting people through churches, markets, and local gathering places and activities.

- Lack of meaningful professional development and follow-up:
  - » ALCs can serve not only as a source of professional development but also as a vehicle for dialogue between community, school, and business partners.
  - » Plan poverty or disability simulations in communities that foster discussion and exchange of information.
  - » Utilize free resources in diversity training and awareness-building and conduct your own informal workshop.
- Lack of opportunities for meaningful contact and exchange among culturally different groups. Resistance and/or fear of engaging in difficult discussions and issues:
  - » Participate in or develop open forums in schools and communities for dialogue, learning, and exchange (e.g., simulations, facilitated dialogues around specific themes, diversity activities and icebreakers, etc.).
  - » Celebrate diversity! Once you know the diversity in the community, find ways to acknowledge and celebrate it. Carteret County held a successful Family Fun Quest that connected families and the business community. Personalize invitations to families—a kind word can make all the difference.

**Ready Schools in Action:**

**Respecting Diversity:**
**Carteret County & Bouge Sound Elementary**

In Carteret County, one school hosted an informal make-and-take lesson at the trailer park where many of their students lived. Teachers set up a few tables on the grounds and invited families to join them.

The Bogue Sound Elementary model classrooms used a variety of instructional practices such as accessible materials and seat selection designed to engage students with varying cognitive and physical abilities. For example, classroom displays were reflective of diverse racial and ethnic cultures and languages and teachers maintained high expectations for learning for all children while providing accommodations as needed. Additionally, students were encouraged to select a seating arrangement to meet their needs. Students could chose to sit in a laundry basket, use a carpet square, or sit directly on the carpet.

## Strategies for Overcoming Issues/Challenges/Barriers

According to Barbara Bowman (North Central Regional Educational Library, 1994), there are several strategies that can bring families, schools, and communities closer to reaching this goal. The Community-District Team can affect positive change in the Respecting Diversity Pathway by doing and advocating for the following:

> Listen to the voices of excluded minorities. It is essential that minority communities feel a greater sense of ownership regarding school standards if they are to cooperate in preparing their children. Involvement by parents and community members from these minority groups in setting nationwide readiness criteria can help diffuse this issue.

> Change how schools interact with other community institutions. Collaboration with social service and health delivery systems is just the beginning. Establishing cooperative relationships with parks, districts, libraries, day care centers, and homes is equally important.

> Prepare teachers and schools to educate a greater range of children. Early childhood personnel need to be better prepared to help children for whom school represents a major challenge. When the match between children's prior experience and the expectations of schools is too great, children are less likely to succeed. Mismatches occur when developmental criteria, expectations for individual performance, and definitions for members of various culture groups are overly narrow or rigid.

Unless we speak out about the relationship between culture, development, and education, we cannot hope to provide the kind of schooling needed to carry us safely into the 21st century. The Community-District Team must advocate for broader approaches to teaching that are more consistent with what is known about child development.

http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le0bow.htm

## Diversity Training and Awareness Resources

### Dimensions of Diversity

http://diversityeducation.cas.psu.edu/
The goal of this site is to provide resources to help all of us increase our awareness, understanding, and value of diversity. This site contains a quarterly newsletter, diversity program materials, publications, curricula, and links to other diversity-related resources and sites. Many materials may be downloaded and printed.

### Ed Change

http://www.edchange.org/
Offers professional development, research, and resources for diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural competence.

### Teaching Tolerance

http://www.tolerance.org/professional-development
Provides educational materials from articles that make you think to presentations you can share. These resources are designed to help teachers improve their practice and turn K-12 schools into strong communities that welcome diversity, giving all students an opportunity to learn.

### The W. K. Kellogg Foundation

http://ww2.wkkf.org/Pubs/CustomPubs/CPtoolkit/cptoolkit/Sec3-Including.htm
Provides information regarding diversity training, cultural competence, cultural celebrations, and issues of power.

For more resources see
Appendix E, Resources
for Pathway Four:
Respecting Diversity
at the end of the Toolkit.