

MMSD  
Culturally and Linguistically  
Responsive Strategies  
Project Overview

*August 2015*



## MMSD

Culturally and Linguistically  
Responsive Strategies

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## Purpose and Guidance

Great Teaching communicates MMSD's vision and goals for effective teaching that is responsive to the cultural and language assets of all students. As part of MMSD's efforts to define Great Teaching, we sought to clearly outline a set of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices that would undergird all of our work. This includes serving as a foundation for our new teacher and administrator induction program, coach training and ongoing professional development.

The Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices Project was developed for this purpose. This six month project involved students and staff and was patterned after a process called "The Students' Six," out of Chapel Hill, NC, a member district of the Minority Student Achievement Network. The result of this Project is a set of six Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices that are meant to engage, challenge and build learner independence.

As these strategies are implemented in schools and classrooms across the district, the importance of addressing personal identity in terms of culture, language and race must happen simultaneously. MMSD staff must identify and reject bias while maintaining an open mind. The path ahead will provide opportunities for our district to think and operate in new ways.

This project identifies a set of research based strategies that will lead all staff on a journey of developing the mindset and belief as well as the skill set to meet the needs of our diverse student population, setting high and clear expectations for all and providing acceleration for those who need it.

Our commitment to Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices as the center of Great Teaching aligns all staff with the simple but bold vision that every school is a thriving school that prepares every student for college, career and community.





# High Leverage Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Strategies

## **Practice #1 Set high and clear expectations for all students**

- Demonstrate through actions and words the belief that each and every student can achieve high standards and participate fully in the classroom community
- Engage in asset-based thinking and practices and assume positive intentions
- Provide appropriate scaffolds and accelerated support to ensure equitable access to grade level content, academic language growth and materials
- Communicate, target and assess standards-based learning targets and language objectives
- Teach with attention to social-instructional and academic language proficiency development

## **Practice #2 Acknowledge all students**

- Use proximity and eye contact with sensitivity to students' cultural and linguistic background
- Use affirming and clarifying language
- Be consistent and positive in delivery and approach
- Create equitable opportunities for successful participation in class activities

## **Practice #3 Develop Self Efficacy**

- Encourage student agency in learning and school-community engagement
- Provide students with the criteria, standards and linguistic models for classroom tasks
- Explain, model, and support positive self-talk in culturally appropriate ways
- Engage students setting goals and self-assessing content and language learning

## **Practice #4 Connect to students' lives and funds of knowledge**

- Connect content with students' cultural and language practices, perspectives and personal goals
- Connect purpose for learning to students' current and possible selves
- Create equitable access to culturally and linguistically responsive materials and resources
- Build equitable, productive and caring relationships

## **Practice #5 Apply academic press**

- Engage students in complex, high level learning, critical thinking and accountable talk
- Monitor comprehension of language and content and offer meaningful and timely feedback
- Use student performance data to scaffold content and language learning
- Ask students for feedback on effectiveness of instruction
- Demonstrate depth of subject matter knowledge and model life-long learning
- Prepare and assess student readiness for language demands of content and tasks

## **Practice #6 Value and be responsive to racial, cultural and linguistic identities**

- Create a safe space for sensitive, productive and inclusive conversations on race, culture and languages
- Deepen understanding and create inclusive classroom community
- Understand and validate cultural and linguistic behavior patterns
- Value, welcome and build upon home cultures and languages as assets



## Process Overview

MMSD Instructional Resource Teachers for Cultural Relevance, Kim O'Donahue and Paddy Greeley, facilitated the project. Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, Kellner Family Chair in Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, advised this project. Her definition of Culturally Relevant Teaching provided a frame for the work, and her expertise and guidance informed all stages. The project was broken down into phases:

1. Planning and preparation
  - a. Research "The Students' Six"
  - b. Create outcomes and timeline
2. Identifying staff, students and community partners
  - a. Create criteria for student and teacher advisory groups
  - b. Request recommendations from principals and letters of interest from staff
  - c. Consult with Multicultural Students Services Coordinators and community partners
3. Gathering data from staff and students
  - a. Convene teacher advisory to analyze research and identify best practices
  - b. Convene student advisory to interview students
4. Determining strategies based on the data collected
  - a. Transcribe student interviews and identify patterns
  - b. Create recommendations for strategies

The phases were essential to the work and the strategies will become the center of MMSD's Great Teaching definition.



## Teacher Advisory

The K-12 teacher advisory group convened to synthesize research and identify key strategies based on success. Principals were asked to recommend teachers using the following criteria:

- Academic and/or behavioral success with traditionally underserved students
- Strong relationships with students and families
- Solid understanding of standards based teaching

Once identified, teachers were asked to submit a short letter of interest to communicate their experiences and reasons for wanting to participate on the advisory group. The teacher advisory group consisted of twenty two Madison Metropolitan School District K-12 Staff.

Stephanie Bernard

Erin Davenport

Norma Furger

Elizabeth Hauser

Amy Kane

Kelly A Lawler

Kim O'Donahue

Cynthia Price

Kim Robinson

Nichole VonHaden

Leah Zepeda

Pamela Dorn

Pamela Ferrill

Paddy Greeley

Lisa Hoon

Denise J. Kalscheur

Debra Minahan

Emily Pease-Clem

Mary Ringelstetter

Beth Steffen

Lorie Wesolek

Lauren Zepp

The group met on three occasions to synthesize research, create a clear understanding of academic press, analyze student data and identify patterns in order to make recommendations.





## Student Advisory

Student voice was at the center of this work. The high school student advisory group convened to offer feedback and suggestions based on personal student experiences within the Madison Metropolitan School District. The students were selected based upon the following criteria:

- Leadership skills
- Ethnically and linguistically diverse background
- Representation from grades 9-12
- Gender balance
- Ability to express ideas and opinions

The student advisory group consisted of thirteen members who met for a full day retreat.

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In addition, middle school and elementary school students contributed to this project through building based conversations.

The retreat facilitators carefully selected the group and planned the event. The retreat began with a welcome from Superintendent Cheatham. Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings followed by leading students in discussion identifying what they liked and disliked about school. The students spent the majority of the retreat in a series of five break-out sessions focusing on the following topics:

- Classroom management
- Curriculum
- Teaching
- Physical space and physical movement
- Culture and language





The facilitators were:

- JoAnne Brown, MMSD Multicultural Student Service Coordinator
- Johnnie Milton, MMSD Multicultural Student Service Coordinator
- Key Jackson, Gay-Straight Safe Alliance
- Ali Muldrow, Gay-Straight Safe Alliance
- Yorel Lashley, University of Wisconsin

Each breakout session was recorded and the transcripts were analyzed for patterns. The data was synthesized down to six recommendations for high leverage, culturally and linguistically responsive strategies.

In conclusion, this report and the six strategies informed by students and teachers, represent a new beginning for culturally and linguistically responsive work in MMSD. Through teacher input, the project was able to build on deep, rich work already happening in our schools. Through student testimonials, the project captured an authenticity that reflects and validates current research on culturally responsive practices. The six strategies provide a focus for staff to use as tools to ensure that every MMSD student is college, career and community ready.





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