

## Our Collective Commitment to Accelerating Learning: Instructional Principles for Schools, 2021-22 Community Reflection Tool

Dear School Leader,

This Community Reflection Tool was designed to support every school in our system to thoughtfully prepare for the 2021-2022 school year, consistent with our [Collective Commitment to Accelerating Learning: Instructional Principles for Schools](#). Since the NYC school system has worked to advance equity over the past decade with marked successes in areas, many schools have already begun their journey towards creating a culturally relevant and rigorous learning community; while others are just at the beginning. Wherever you and your school community may be, you may feel overwhelmed with the work before you and the urgency of supporting our students in new and innovative ways. You are not expected to take on this work alone, and it will undoubtedly require the strategic wisdom of your entire school community and the intentional focus of our system as we together reimagine what teaching and learning looks like for the future.

**We believe that you can only accelerate learning by employing Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE) practices with the ultimate goal of ensuring high expectations and rigorous instruction that begins with a welcoming and affirming environment and uses inclusive curricula and assessment, which is all accomplished by creating space and time for ongoing and targeted collaborative professional learning for educators.**

You are encouraged to think broadly in envisioning the ways your community can co-create and sustain an ever-evolving welcoming and inclusive community that values and honors students, families, and staff. This tool is intended to facilitate discussion, reflection, and planning among members of your school community. The goal is to ensure an equitable learning environment of high expectations and rigorous instruction where everyone experiences a sense of dignity, belonging, and inclusion in the upcoming school year.

We hope that this tool is helpful and provides you and your team with valuable insights about where your school is currently, your hopes and dreams about where your school will be a year from now, and begin to plan for ways you can engage all stakeholders and build capacity to make this work a reality.

*"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."* —Helen Keller

## How to Use this Tool

The Community Reflection is organized by the four priority areas outlined in our [Collective Commitment to Accelerating Learning: Instructional Principles for Schools](#), which correspond with the four principles of the [NYSED Culturally Responsive- Sustaining Education Framework](#):

1. Welcoming and Affirming Environment
2. High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction
3. Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment
4. Ongoing Professional Learning and Support

School leaders should include a wide range of stakeholder perspectives—including but not limited to students, families, teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, support staff, and external partners—to engage with this tool. Stakeholders can use the sample practices below to reflect on the current state of the school community (considering a pre-and post-pandemic context), noting both areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

As you reflect on each of the four Instructional Principles, your team might identify key practices for each principle that can drive your work in implementing the [Collective Commitment to Accelerating Learning](#). Throughout the summer and fall of 2021, work with your team supported by your Superintendent and Borough/Citywide Offices (BCOs) to develop plans to leverage existing structures to build capacity and identify key practices to address areas for growth.

## Welcoming and Affirming Environment

A welcoming and affirming environment is authentically created by embedding relationships\* in all aspects of the school community and leveraging those relationships as a component of culturally responsive teaching and learning. Knowing students well and holding an asset-based mindset that honors and affirms students as individuals with multiple identities and cultures is a necessary prerequisite to understand individual skill development, habits and areas for growth to accelerate learning. These environments serve as the enabling conditions (or leading indicators) of student success—academic, personal and cultural.

*\*student/student, student/adult, adult/adult, and extending to relationships beyond the school building*

PRACTICES	What does this look like in our community currently?	What are potential areas of growth? Suggestions on how to improve:
Assume collective responsibility to learn about students' cultures, identities, interests, and communities. Highlight materials that represent and affirm student identities in learning experiences.		
Foster close relationships with students and families, including working with families to gather insights into students' cultures, backgrounds, goals, and interests.		
Assess school climate using a variety of measures (i.e., surveys, interviews, focus groups, informal gatherings) to collect diverse stakeholder impressions and experiences using questions that consider issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.		
Prioritize social-emotional learning programs, such as restorative justice, and clearly connect this to academic learning.		

<p>Cultivate a school and classroom environment of affirmation, belonging, acceptance, risk-taking, and learning from mistakes focused on student experiences. Develop norms with students for engaging, collaborating, and constructive discussion.</p>		
<p>Develop feelings of community and belonging among educators and other adults in the building.</p>		

## High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction

High expectations and rigorous instruction are grounded in cultural competence and a firm belief in every child's ability, aptitude, and value. As schools engage in cycles of continuous improvement and foster innovation and reflection, adults\* understand the impact of beliefs and biases on student achievement. Adults focus on co-creating academically rigorous learning experiences shaped by the belief that intelligence is malleable and with a deep commitment to development, engagement, and improvement in sustainable and equitable ways. A standard of excellence drives all teachers to develop challenging assignments, cultivate individual and collective expertise, and create cognitive and effective learning environments that recognize and celebrate hard work.

*\*teachers, school leaders, system leaders, and extending to every adult in the school system*

PRACTICES	What does this look like in our community currently?	What are potential areas of growth? Suggestions on how to improve:
Facilitate high-cognitive demand teaching and learning practices that enable individuals to grow as independent learners, think critically, take risks and learn from mistakes, make meaning of new concepts in multiple ways, and apply learning to meaningful, real world situations.		
Teachers use tools and strategies to tap into the assets students bring with them into the classroom, use this information to adjust instruction and curricular materials in ways that make learning more relevant and meaningful to students.		
Initiate student-led civic engagement projects and school-based student leadership opportunities.		
Learning is personalized and differentiated to tap into the culture, identity, and joy of all learners.		

Ensure students receive high quality feedback from teachers and have opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about their unique challenges and opportunities.		
Ensure students feel a part of a learning community—both with other students and with their teachers— so that they are comfortable taking risks, engaging in high-quality academic discourse by taking ownership of discussions, and developing the academic and personal skill set needed to become independent learners.		

## Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment

Rigorous and effective curriculum and assessment systems integrate culture, identity, and perspective as essential components of the learning process; reject traditional power hierarchies that inhibit authentic student voice and collaboration; and embrace culturally affirming and sustaining content and pedagogical practices. Assessment systems should be comprehensive using a variety of assessments that offer different information and provide a full picture of student learning and well-being rather than focus on high stakes tests. Educators are equipped with creative tools to ensure they can be proactive in understanding how students are experiencing the social, geo-political, and academic environment and focus on the enabling conditions that lead to achievement at grade level and beyond.

PRACTICES	What does this look like in our community currently?	What are potential areas of growth? Suggestions on how to improve:
Incorporate high-quality curriculum, texts, content, and assignments that activate connections to student experiences and identities while providing students with opportunities to discover, research, and build deep knowledge and understanding of themes, content, and concepts taught.		
Integrate current events into daily instruction to empower students to take action when analyzing social, economic, and political forces that affect their community, both locally and globally.		
Encourage students to explore completing assignments in multiple languages.		

Use resources developed and written from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives.		
Give students choices in the ways they learn to foster independence while coaching students as they develop self-awareness about themselves as learners.		
Ensure curriculum and content is reflective of students' cultural, racial, religious and community identities.		
Integrate social and emotional skill building across all classes so students understand they receive both academic, social and emotional support within the school community.		
Utilize measures and metrics of student talent and genius that extend beyond traditional academic indicators such as GPA and Test Scores to ensure students are provided equitable opportunities to succeed and advance.		
Embed opportunities for students and staff to critically examine topics of power and privilege.		



# Ongoing Professional Learning and Support

Learning is a lifelong pursuit. Professional learning should be rooted in the idea that teaching and learning is an adaptive process needing constant reexamination (Moll, et al., 1992; Gay, 2010). To this end, schools must establish and foster purposeful adult learning communities to build capacity of educators to create welcoming and affirming environments that center students’ lived experiences and make learning responsive, rigorous, and relevant to ensure every student is equipped to meet standards and beyond for post-secondary success. These communities of practice should provide educators with concrete opportunities to learn from one another, to join in community with each other, and to strengthen their daily practice that is accountable for student progress.

PRACTICES	What does this look like in our community currently?	What are potential areas of growth? Suggestions on how to improve:
Create learning communities (i.e., professional learning communities, book studies, discussion groups) for teachers and students to engage in topics that directly address educator and student identities while understanding and unpacking privilege.		
Analyze data (i.e., discipline, enrollment, social-emotional and academic performance, etc.) through a disproportionality lens to explore trends across subgroups; tailoring and differentiating professional learning based on student outcomes and trends.		

Provide opportunities for all staff to receive training on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (i.e., critical self-reflection, disproportionality, anti-bias, belonging, developing racial literacy, combating racism, and implicit bias).		
Foster communities of practice and inquiry through which adult learners have safe spaces to explore, experiment, and take risks in service of ensuring student success and equitable outcomes.		
Support teachers in conducting cross-curricular culturally responsive sustaining planning sessions by providing forums for collaborative planning, drafting, mapping, and aligning.		

## Reflecting On Your Responses

After completing the exercises associated with each Instructional Principle addressed in this tool, the questions below can be used to guide examination of your responses and identify key practices within each principle that will drive your work as you implement our [Collective Commitment to Accelerating Learning](#).

- **What are areas of success for each principle?** We have solid practices in each of these principles but need to build empathy across the school community
- **For each principle, which practices are most promising to improve upon?** SEL practices across the school community
- **How might you leverage your school community's successes to support your growth?** Will continue to use data to support growth in leadership and support successful outcomes for students.
- **How might you use the insight you gleaned from this reflection tool within existing structures and plans (i.e., CEP, Professional Learning Plans)?** Will add them to our professional learning materials for the school
- **What initial actions might you prioritize as a school community?** A week of SEL activities; SEL retreat for the entire school community.
- What specific support do you foresee needing? From who?