

special bulletin

Equity Corner

Discrimination Free and Culturally Welcome

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The school year is off to a running start, and we as educators have the wonderful opportunity afforded us by every new school year. We have a fresh canvas, fresh faces, an optimistic outlook. This is the time we can look around us to assess the climate of our classrooms, our schools, and our district. It is the mission of public schools to provide educational opportunities for all students. It is the duty of educators to take steps to assure an environment that is open and inviting—discrimination free and culturally welcoming. There are many resources available to help us in this assessment of our school culture. Here are a few:

Cultural Competence

The National Association of School Psychologists provides several resources for school districts. Visit their Web site at nasponline.org/resources for information about equity issues. For example, they provide a checklist in “cultural competence” that districts can use for a self analysis. The following checklist is based on a monograph, *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*, available at georgetown.edu/research/gucdc/ncccl. Ask yourself, does our district:

- *Make the educational environment more welcoming and attractive based on families' cultural mores.*
- *Avoid stereotyping and misapplication of scientific knowledge.*
- *Include community input at the planning and development stage of projects.*
- *Use educational approaches and materials that will capture the attention of your intended audience.*
- *Find ways to partner with the community.*
- *Understand there is no recipe.*
- *Hire staff who reflect the client population.*
- *Understand cultural competency is continually evolving.*
- *Be creative in finding ways to communicate with population groups that have limited English-speaking proficiency.*

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In addition to a generalized assessment, there are several specific issues to consider. Because of limited space, we'll consider two areas:

Gender Bias

David and Myra Sadker, American University, Washington, have done much research and writing in the area of gender equity. According to their Web site, “Clearly sexism is not a ‘girls-only’ issue. Until educational sexism is eradicated, all children will be shortchanged and their gifts lost to society.” Access the Sadker Web site, american.edu/sadker/genderequity.htm, for an equity primer, equity quiz, explanation of seven forms of bias in textbooks, classroom tips for non-biased teaching, and a report card on the costs of gender bias.

Size Bias

In today's culture, much attention is paid to the epidemic of childhood obesity. Indeed, it has great ramifications for the health and wellness of our future society. Schools are taking seriously the need to create a healthy environment for all students. But beyond the elements of providing healthy food choices and integrating exercise into the school day, there is the question of how students of all body types treat each other.

Scott Herschfield, in *The ABC's of Size Bias*, states, “Largely overlooked in this battle against obesity, however, is the collateral damage to young people stemming from the social consequences of size stigma and society's harmful fixation on thinness.” Size bias hurts students! Check out the *Teaching Tolerance* Web site, tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&ar=825&pa=5, for an introduction to size bias, lesson plans, and a host of other valuable resources.

Yes, as educators carry out the critical mission of public schools, there is a lot to think about. We, however, must ask ourselves what the consequences would be if we did not address these issues. Our very society depends upon our vigilance in all matters regarding culture and equity.

