

OMHNSS Information Brief

The Case for Culturally Competent Schools

This information brief was developed for the Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success (OMNHSS), by the Center for School-Based Mental Health Programs (CSBMHP) graduate research assistance Julie Platten. A copy of the brief and an expanded report of all OMHNSS information briefs are available at www.omnhss.org

What is Cultural Competency?

- Cultural competency cannot be concretely obtained; it is a process of becoming more aware and more sensitive to one's own culture and the culture of others. Additionally, cultural competency involves an understanding of how culture affects day to day interactions and responses to others.
- As an individual or organization progresses towards cultural competency, a typical response includes strengthening in the areas of:
 - Self awareness, particularly in the area of how and why one's background may be influencing present-day responses to others and situations
 - Positive attitudes towards other cultures
 - A willingness to engage in conversations with others about their cultural experiences and influences
 - An empathic understanding of others' experiences
 - A growing comfort in discussing differences and similarities between individuals and/or groups of people
 - An appreciation of multiple perspectives

A Culturally Competent School

Honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures (Klotz, 2006).

Makes it a priority to create and maintain an environment where the policies, practices, and attitudes support all students and promote effective, respectful ways of serving diverse populations.

How is Cultural Competency Assessed?

- Cultural competency is assessed based on:
 - Understanding of one's own ethnocentrism (cultural worldview)
 - Appreciation of students' cultural background
 - Development of a flexible understanding of cultural practices in broader social, economic, and political contexts
 - The ability and willingness to use culturally sensitive management in order to build more culturally responsive, positive classroom and school atmospheres (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004).

Cultural competency is a process of becoming more aware and more sensitive to one's own culture and the culture of others.

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The Case for Culturally Competent Schools, Continued...

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Why is it important to become a culturally competent school?

- An increasing percentage of ethnically diverse students are enrolling in primary and secondary education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).
- Recent research shows that 1 in 5 students live in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2001).
- Because teacher reactions to students, both positive and negative, influence student's self-esteem and academic success (Brown, 2007), it is important for teachers to understand how to respond to students in a way that is effective and easily interpretable by the students in their classroom.
- Some cultural conflicts in schools can be avoided when cultural competency is a highly prioritized ideal.
 - For example, African American students' behaviors are consistent with African American cultural expectations and can come in stark contrast to the mainstream cultural expectations placed on them by their teachers (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005).

Cultural competency enhances a teacher's ability to create an environment that is fair, understanding, and accepting of diverse students, ideas, experiences, and backgrounds (Brown, 2007).

What can a school do to become more culturally competent?

- Encourage the development and exploration of individual cultural identities, while promoting an openness to create dialogue around cultural differences and similarities.
- Encourage teachers to hold cultural sensitivity discussions with students when opportunities arise out of the material being covered in class lessons.
- Teach and model important values and appropriate classroom behavior at every level of the school structure.
- Provide communications from the school in appropriate languages for parents and community members.
- Have childcare available at parent meetings.
- Help students develop a sense of civic responsibility toward their family, community, nation, and world.
- Collaborate with parents and community members and invite them to share their cultures with the school.

For more information about how a school can become more culturally competent, please visit these resource websites concerning the importance of culturally competent schools

<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/culturalcompetency.pdf>,

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Culturally%20Competent%20Schools%20NASSP.pdf> <http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=9.0.htm&module=provider&language=English>.