



## Why should schools focus on the cultures of their students?

The New York State Education Department understands culture as the multiple components of one's identity, including but not limited to: race, economic background, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability. Culture far transcends practices such as cuisines, art, music, and celebrations to also include ways of thinking, values, and forms of expression. These ways and forms are in constant flux, renegotiation, and evolution. Schools then become a meeting point for cultures, containing children and adults who bring with them multiple facets of their identity, along with unique experiences and perspectives.

From this perspective, learning is rooted in the lives and experiences of people and cultivated through activities that people find meaningful. When teaching is not rooted in students' lives, student learning suffers. Perhaps worse, biases take hold and deficit perspectives become normalized throughout our schools and classrooms, structuring entire systems that blame students for failure.

The school community is representative of many cultures, and therefore culture has consequences on how students experience schools. The framework is intentional about the relationship between culture and education, presenting a multi-tiered

## What is culture?

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systems approach for cultural inclusion that broadens what ethnic groups, classes, sexualities, and abilities are privileged in the creation and maintenance of traditional education.

Research suggests that many students whose cultures are more closely aligned with the “cultural fabric” of schools experience praise and are viewed as more dedicated than those whose home cultures differ. Educators committed to understanding both the concept of culture and many different cultures

can refocus their lens for viewing students’ cultures not as “deficiencies to overcome” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87), but as assets. Students from different cultures possess vibrant realities and rich reservoirs of knowledge. By making all cultures matter, our students’ cultures can be positioned as strengths and as the foundation of empowering, rigorous, and innovative learning.



Learn more about the [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#).

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