

7 Ways to Create an Inclusive Classroom Environment

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Recently, we've seen a number of institutions of higher education begin taking steps to [diversify their school environments](#). Unfortunately, we haven't seen the same with schools in K-12 systems.

The inaction comes at a harsh price, both to students' education and to their development as informed, empathetic global citizens. According to [The Century Foundation](#), inclusive classroom settings lead to beneficial academic outcomes and better interpersonal relations for students of all backgrounds. Giving children the opportunity to interact with people of different races and socioeconomic statuses reduces stereotypes and intolerance. The Century Foundation also references data showing integrated schooling closes the achievement gap, and allows more equal access to facilities, [resources](#) and highly-trained teachers.

[Recent demographic changes](#) point to an increased potential for integrated academic communities, as urban areas gentrify and more families of color move into historically white majority suburbs. But school districts should not rely on ever-evolving neighborhood conditions to ensure racial diversity.

Below, read about 7 ways education leaders can work to create inclusive academic settings that support young students of all races and economic classes.

1. Academic Support

[Inclusive Learning](#) recommends schools provide academic support services to ensure all students have the opportunity to thrive. Flexible pacing, reading specialists and tutoring can be especially helpful to students with learning differences or who speak English as a second language.

2. Prepare Teachers

Highly trained teachers are vital to educating students about privilege and oppression. But according to a [piece](#) from Counseling@NYU, which offers

an [online masters in school counseling](#) from NYU Steinhardt, many teachers do not have enough of an understanding of these topics to properly support students.

“I think that educators — whoever is holding the discussion — have to be competent about privilege, power and oppression and aware of how race impacts the greater society — not just the schools themselves,” says Joseph Feola, a school counselor at Manhattan’s Stuyvesant High School and adjunct professor in the NYU Steinhardt program. “When it comes to districts providing training for teachers and counselors,” he said. “We’re not doing a great job right now.”

Teachers without training may also use [hurtful language](#), or perform other micro-aggressions like, as [Inclusive Schools](#) points out, mispronouncing names of students of color.

For educators to effectively [support a community](#), they need to see themselves as more than conveyors of fact. They need to hold their students to high expectations, prioritize closing the achievement gap, and help their students understand and connect to the world at large.

3. Curriculum

It’s rare for school curriculums to address concepts like privilege, oppression, global power structures and racism. But according to information presented at the [Massachusetts Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#), this as a key step in combating inequality.

By only formally instructing on academic disciplines like math, schools provide students with a knowledge of facts that doesn’t connect to today’s greater world. This type of education gives no counter to prejudiced beliefs white students may encounter at home, in media, or from the world at large, and no context for students of color to make sense of their own experiences in our current society.

4. Integrate Student Bodies

Many measures have been proposed to integrate student body populations, from voluntary transfer programs to redrawing school neighborhood boundaries. [The Century Foundation](#) suggests federal and state incentives for districts that assume these kind of redistricting policies.

5. Adjust Ranking Calculations

One way the educational system can address school inequality is by adjusting evaluation measurements to take both diversity of student population and intercultural understanding into account, says [The Century Foundation](#). Schools should be penalized for failing to address these concerns.

6. Create a Respectful School Community

Outside individual classrooms, educators can also make sure they foster an inclusive larger school community. Hire a staff that [reflects the diversity of the students](#) and demonstrate [on an institutional level](#) a respect for people of all races and economic backgrounds and with all different strengths. Let students know that the staff can serve as a resource to help them navigate issues related to discrimination and oppression.

7. Create A Space for Discussion

Educators can promote inclusivity by creating environments where students can openly discuss thoughts and feelings about privilege and structural oppression.

“My job is to raise awareness of what’s going on and just create an environment where we can talk,” said Veronica Pichardo, an adjunct professor at [Counseling@NYU](#). “By creating that space and that environment for them to truly just dive deep and flesh out these feelings that they have or these assumptions that they have.”

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