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Just as our world and American workplaces are experiencing an increase in diversity, so are our classrooms in Plainville. And just as those workplaces are experiencing the benefits of such an influx, so are our schools. Research on effective educational strategies points us toward a theory of teaching and learning that addresses the important role of knowing and understanding the culture of our students and using such knowledge to inform curriculum development and teaching methodologies. One such theory is Culturally Responsive Education/Teaching.

We firmly agree with Gloria Ladson-Billings that: "Culturally Responsive Education/Teaching is an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes."

It is no secret that culture is central to learning and influences how individuals process, communicate, and share their learning with others. When we think of diversity, we often think in terms of race, class, gender, language, religion, mental and physical ability levels, immigration status, etc. Diversity also includes differences in backgrounds, sets of experiences, cultural contexts, and worldviews.

At first glance, these differences may sound rather daunting and challenging to navigate and incorporate, but in Plainville Community Schools, we have committed ourselves to embracing diversity, through Culturally Responsive Education as it enriches and prepares us all for life in the 21st century and a global society.

Through Culturally Responsive Teaching, we are exploring pedagogical, curricular, and instructional shifts to highlight and honor the contributions of various

groups and cultures. We are further investigating how we as educators can build nurturing and supportive relationships with individuals and groups who experience cultural, linguistic, gender, religious, and racial diversity.

In their 2012 position statement, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) asserted, *“Culturally responsive education supports students in developing a lifelong appreciation for understanding and valuing cultural understanding in all settings of life. The incorporation of culturally responsive education as a critical component of all current curriculum, activities and services is a mainstream pedagogical practice that can serve to improve the academic lives of all students.”*

On our journey through Culturally Responsive Education and Teaching, there are a few key strategies we are incorporating:

- Making multicultural connections by being sensitive to the diversity and developing and promoting positive ethnic identity,
- Including students with special needs and teaching all students about disabilities to facilitate social acceptance,
- Cultivating gender sensitivity by encouraging discussion about gender equity issues and preventing gender inequities in classroom activities,
- Supporting students who are economically disadvantaged through the use of instructional strategies,
- Working with parents about how to help their children succeed, and by involving parents as resources in the classroom,
- Involving students meaningfully and fully into the learning community,

- Acknowledging and utilizing students' true-life experiences as legitimate parts of the curriculum. (This requires empathy, compassion, and understanding of the lives students lead.)

-Culturally Responsive Education Handbook, CSDE

In the Plainville school system we are committed to ensuring that all students feel safe, both physically and emotionally, in order for learning to occur at its optimum. Incorporating Culturally Responsive Education is an integral step towards providing that type of education and better preparing our students to enter a diverse workforce and compete for jobs with their counterparts in a global economy.