Creating a Safe and Equitable Learning Environment

Competency

Educators will identify and implement key policy, and culturally-competent practices that lead to safe and equitable learning environments for students.

Key Method

Educators will create and implement a plan to use in their school or classroom that promotes a safe and equitable learning environment.

Method Components

What is DECC?

Diversity, Equity, and Cultural Competence (DECC) are essential components of a thriving learning community.

- **Diversity** is the presence of differences that include race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language and physical appearance, and more. Diversity also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values. Being specific about which diversity is lacking in an area is critical. Saying "X" was not a racially diverse space, or "Y" event had little gender diversity helps clarify what is meant when we say, "diversity."

- **Equity** refers to fairness and justice. It recognizes that advantages and barriers exist. As a result, everyone does not start from the same place. It is a process that begins by acknowledging that unequal starting place and works to correct and address the imbalance. Creating equity is an ongoing process that strives to ensure that people who have been marginalized have ongoing opportunities to grow and thrive.

- **Cultural Competence** is the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own.

  Part of being culturally competent includes having cultural humility, . a dispositional trait that allows us to be dynamic. “It takes the stance of being open to the “other” when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, cultural humility lacks the superiority complex evident when an individual interprets their own cultural values as more meaningful and worthwhile than the values of others. Rather than concentrating solely on knowledge of another person’s cultural background, cultural humility proposes openness and humility when engaging with individuals from a cultural background different from our own.” *Source: Celebrating Cultural Humility in Education*

This micro-credential will equip and prepare you to support students on a variety of topics related to diversity, equity and cultural competence.

Safe and Equitable Learning Environments

Safe and equitable learning environments are essential for educators, students, and families to thrive. There are three types of school safety:

Physical Safety—The protection of everyone — families, caregivers, students, school staff, and the larger community — from violence, theft, weapons, and other threats.

Mental Safety (Psychological Safety) — Having the belief that you will not be humiliated or teased when you offer ideas, ask questions, and admit to making mistakes. Mental safety is the freedom from retribution, embarrassment, unwanted attention, punishment, or ridicule.

Emotional Safety — Feeling safe to express emotions without fear of being put down, criticized, or told to act, be or feel different.

Equitable Learning Environments ensure “every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income.” (*Source: The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers,2017*)

The unfortunate reality is that many students do not feel safe or can experience an equitable learning environment. Data from 2015 show:

- 28% of students in grades 6–12 reported being bullied at school and online
- 5.6% of 9th–12th graders did not go to school because they felt unsafe
- 46% of girls and 22% of boys in grades 7–12 reported being sexually harassed

Source: Readiness & Emergency Management for Schools: Student Perceptions of Safety Fact Sheet

Every student deserves a safe, welcoming, affirming learning environment. For this to happen, educators must:

- Implement racial justice
- Prevent violence and bullying
- Promote gender equality
- Support LGBTQ+ youth
- Support students with differing abilities

The Impact of Unsafe Schools

An unsafe school environment can dramatically shift school culture, student learning, and the social and emotional health of students and staff. Studies show that unsafe school environments also affect student attendance, which leads to increased absences, lower academic performance, and disengagement from school. In unsafe schools, the quality of education can also suffer. It is difficult for students to focus on instruction when they feel under physical, mental or emotional threat.

School Resource Officers

In many of the nation's schools and districts, School Resource Officers (SROs) are meant to promote and improve school safety, but studies show their presence often creates unsafe spaces for students of color and can trigger physical, mental and emotional stress.

Data from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) show that schools with SROs reported 3.5 times as many arrests as schools without police. These arrests disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities. Just as there is a concentration of police in low-income communities of color, their presence in schools is also racialized. According to findings from the ACLU, "students of color are more likely to go to a school with a police officer, more likely to be referred to law enforcement, and more likely to be arrested at school. Nationally, Black students are more than twice as likely as their White classmates to be referred to law enforcement. Black students are three times as likely to be arrested as their White classmates, and in some states, Black girls are over eight times as likely to be arrested as White girls. During the 2015-16 school year, 1.6 million students attended a school with a sworn law enforcement officer and no counselor."

The presence of SROs in schools contributes to the "school-to-prison pipeline," a process in which a school's disciplinary policies and practices put students into contact with law enforcement and the criminal juvenile justice system. Instead of receiving interventions such as restorative practices, counseling, or providing other support, an overwhelming number of students of color are placed in the hands of law enforcement who are trained to detain, handcuff, and arrest.

According to data from the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights:

- **SROs do not improve school safety or reduce school violence.** There is no clear evidence that SROs or guards in schools are effective in preventing school violence.[i] A review of 40 years of evaluations of school policing showed no positive impact on school safety outcomes.[ii]
- **Schools with SROs criminalize and arrest youth for minor misbehavior.** When SROs or security are present in schools, trivial forms of student misconduct are more likely to result in arrest and court referral.[vi] Most secondary school administrators say their SROs are involved in school discipline, even in situations where no crime was committed.[vii]
- **Police encounters trigger stress, fear, trauma, and anxiety for Black and other youth of color**, which can harm their mental health and erode educational performance. The health consequences of police contact are even greater when youth believe they are being stopped or targeted because of their race or ethnicity. One study found that extensive low-level police contact significantly reduced test scores for African-American teenage boys, perpetuating racial inequalities in educational outcomes.[ix]

Strategies to promote safer schools

The data show that when promoting safer schools, students and teachers benefit from strong, authentic relationships, restorative justice practices, mental health services, and social and emotional learning.

The following strategies can be implemented to promote safer and just schools for students:

- Prevent and/or Intervene in Bullying
    - Bullying may be the most prevalent type of school violence. Over 75% of students report being bullied at least once in their school career. Students from marginalized communities (e.g., students of color, LGBTQ+ and students with disabilities) are more likely to be bullied, harassed or victimized by violence in schools. Thus, making bullying prevention a DECC issue. There are many ways to address bullying. Some include:
        - Defining what bullying means for students (harassment, threats of violence, exclusion, physical violence, etc.)
        - Intentionally creating positive and affirming class and school environments
        - Building community among students (e.g., morning meetings, peer buddies, etc.)
        - Surveying students to learn where bullying happens and how
        - Having a visible presence in places where bullying is likely to occur, and interrupting and addressing harmful behavior when it happens
        - Agreeing on classroom safety norms with students

        - Conducting role playing with students to practice how bystanders can interrupt bullying if and when they see it
        - Communicating with parents about behavioral expectations related to bullying
        - Educators and school staff intervening when they witness bullying

- Promote Emotional Safety of Students
    - Emotional safety is essential for learning. When students feel safe, they are better able to discover, explore and fully engage in learning. These are a few ways to promote emotional safety:
        - Create classroom routines that offer predictability
        - Educators model empathy for students
        - Provide opportunities for students to share about how they are feeling, either publicly (i.e., in restorative circles) or privately (i.e., in journals)
        - Create time during the day for a quiet pause or reflection. This allows the brain to "catch up" and process new experiences
        - Build authentic relationships. Taking time to get to know your students will promote their emotional safety
        - Engage students in activities that build trust among each other
        - Encourage and reinforce students treating each other with kindness and respect

- Promote Physical Safety of Students
    - Physical safety ensures students can move about your class and school building without threat of physical harm. You can promote physical safety by:
        - Ensure physical aspects of environment are welcoming, comfortable and safe
        - Designing your classroom space in ways that eliminate clutter and other physical safety hazards
        - Ensuring there are classroom and school policies to promote students' physical safety
        - Practicing "what to do" in the event of emergencies
        - Teach students conflict resolution strategies that do not involve aggressive acts

- Promote the Mental Safety of Students
    - Butnor (year?) asserts that intellectual safety is not simply feeling comfortable; rather you can promote mental safety by:
        - Building strong teacher-student relationships are key to promoting intellectual or mental safety for students
        - Ensuring students connect with and contextualize the curriculum you are teaching
        - Helping students think deeply and critically

- Promote Inclusion & Belonging
    - When all students feel welcomed and included in the classroom, there is a natural sense of safety. You can promote inclusion and belonging by:
        - Integrating aspects of your students' identity and culture into lessons and the academic curriculum
        - Fostering authentic relationships
        - Paying attention to students' needs and emotions. Keep in mind that not every student learns in the same way or feels comfortable participating in class discussions. Consider alternate ways students can show mastery of content
- Address Bias and Discrimination
    - In a safe school environment, all students and staff feel comfortable and supported in being who they are—without the shadow of unconscious bias or more overt -isms and -phobias. You can promote welcoming environments by:
        - Identifying your biases and working to interrupt its influence on your work with students, families, and colleagues
        - Identifying and interrupting the subtle and overt ways systemic racism, discrimination, homophobia and other social injustices may show up in your class or school community
        - Listening and learning from students to understand their experience in your class or school community

Examples of Ways to Promote Safe and Equitable Schools

A few ways in which schools have created conditions to make their learning environments safe and equitable are outlined below.

Schools have:

- Included plans for instruction (whether in-person or virtual) that address racial and social equity in the provision of instruction and support services
- Included professional development training for educators on topics such as cultural responsiveness, bullying, family engagement and more. Included workshops for families about the school system, how to navigate often complex school partnerships, career and college planning, and disability or supplemental services.
- Involved educators, students, and families in each step of the planning process for any form of virtual teaching and learning, including adjusting the curriculum and methods of instruction
- Addressed device access for every student and educator, high-speed internet access for every student and educator, and accommodates gaps in such services.
- Trained staff in proven strategies such as restorative justice practices and trauma-informed practices, and have worked to increase counseling and school health staff to effectively and empathetically support students in ways that allow them to learn, grow, and thrive.

Schools have provided:

- Coordinators to support and respond to student and family concerns around issues that impact student well-being and academic success (including but not limited to technology access, student health and well-being, students with IEPs, English Language Learners, students who are differently abled, students experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ students, students experiencing grief, and students accessing school meals),
- Additional supports such as group counseling, adult mentors, or referrals to community organizations that offer mental health supports and/or social services.
- Care, attention and learning opportunities students are guaranteed and deserve.

Safe and Supportive Schools Model

According to the Safe and Supportive Schools Model, which was developed by a national panel of researchers and other experts, positive school climate includes:

1. Engagement
   This category includes strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and schools; and strong connections between schools and the broader community. The important elements in this category are:
   - Cultural and linguistic competence
   - Authentic relationships
   - School participation
2. Safety
   This category includes schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and controlled-substance use. The important elements in this category are:
   - Emotional safety
   - Physical safety
   - Elimination of bullying/cyberbullying
   - Substance abuse
   - Emergency readiness/management
3. Environment
   This category includes appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy. The important elements in this category are:
   - Safe physical environment
   - Instructional environment
   - Physical health
   - Mental health

- Discipline

Adapted from: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate-improvement

Supporting Rationale and Research

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Resources

Safe and Just Schools

TEDxGoldenGateED - Jeff Duncan-Andrade - Growing Roses in Concrete

What's Cyberbullying?

Cops and No Counselors

Build Your School's Opportunity Checklist

6 Strategies for Building Better Student Relationships

VIDEO: The Power of Relationships in Schools

4 Proven Inclusive Education Strategies for Educators + 6 Resources

Emotional Safety | Safe Supportive Learning

4 Ways Social-Emotional Learning Can Create Safe School Spaces for All Students - Market Brief

School Discipline

Discipline | Safe Supportive Learning

PACE - Supporting students' social-emotional, mental & physical health

What Is the Relationship Between Students' Physical Activity and Mental Health?

Student Perceptions of Safety and Their Impact on Creating a Safe School Environment

SMART GOALS – TEMPLATE

Template for Action Plan

Surveys

School Climate Survey-Elementary

Student Survey - English-Secondary School

Instructional Staff Survey

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and be proficient for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

(400-500 words)
Please use the suggested word count as a guide to answer the following contextual questions. This will help our assessor understand your current context for working on this micro-credential.

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

What information is important to understand the context of your school? Consider things such as population, demographics, any relevant cultural information, urban or rural setting, and special considerations regarding student characteristics. Include any additional information that would be important for the micro-credential assessor to know.

- How many students are in your classroom? (This is important for Artifact 1).
- What is your definition of a safe learning environment?
- What is your definition of an equitable learning environment?
- List the elements or evidence you find of a safe and/or equitable school in your present location.
- Explain why you want to earn this micro-credential. What specific needs do you see at your school concerning a safe and/or just environment that you feel you can help improve?

Passing: Response includes all requested information, including their current definitions of safe and just schools, the elements of safe/just schools found in their current location, and the needs they hope this micro-credential will help fulfill.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential please submit the following three artifacts as evidence of your learning.

**Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

Artifact 1: School Climate Survey and Analysis

1. Administer a school climate survey to at least 90% of students that are enrolled in one of your classes and administer the instructional staff survey to at least three of your colleagues. **The actual surveys do not need to be uploaded** and you may adapt the surveys to be appropriate and relevant to your school and classroom.

2. **(500-700 words)** Compile and upload an analysis of the results. Your analysis should include:
    - Summary of results for both surveys. For each survey include:
        - Number that completed the survey
        - A graph that illustrates results
        - A summary of results statement
        - What you learned
    - Method of administering the surveys
    - Number of people who took the survey
    - Challenges in administration logistics
    - Recommendations: Explain your reasoning based on the results, along with your recommendations for next steps.

Artifact 2: Action Plan
After reviewing your class and educator surveys, select **two** issues that impact safety and/or equity concerns in your classroom or your school. For each issue take the following steps:

1. Complete Part 1 of the Action Plan Template (found in the resource section) using a SMART goal that would alleviate or reduce the concerns (see examples in the resources section).
2. Implement the action plan in your classroom for four weeks.
3. After implementation, complete Part 3 of the template by writing a summary of the results.

Part 2 Rubric

	Proficient	**Basic**	**Developing**
Artifact 1: School Climate Survey Results	Survey is administered to 90% of students in one class and three colleagues. Your analysis includes all of the following: -Summary of results for both surveys. Includes all of the following for each survey: -Number that completed the survey -A graph that illustrates results -A summary statement of results statement -What you learned -Method of administering the surveys -Number of people who took the survey -Challenges in administration logistics	Survey is administered to 50% of the students in the class and two colleagues. Partial summary of the administration is provided. Your analysis includes some all of the following: -Summary of results for both surveys. Includes some of the following for each survey include: -Number that completed the survey -A graph that illustrates results -A summary statement of results -What you learned -Method of administering the surveys -Number of people who took the survey	Survey is administered to less than 25% of students. Teacher survey is administered to at least one colleague. No summary of the administration is provided. Your analysis is missing most of the following: Summary of results for both surveys Missing most of the following for each survey: -Number that completed the survey -A graph that illustrates results -A summary statement of results -What you learned -Method of administering the surveys -Number of people who took the survey

	-Recommendations that includes your reasoning for making the recommendation	-Challenges in administration logistics -Recommendations that include your reasoning for making the recommendation	-Challenges in administration logistics -Recommendations that include your reasoning for making the recommendation
Artifact 2: Action Plan	Action plan is submitted and all parts are completed. The SMART Goal is: -Specific -Measurable -Attainable -Relevant -Timebound And The Strategy(s) aligns with SMART Goal and is realistic And Success criteria is specific and measurable. And Timeframe is realistic. And	Action plan incorporates only portions of a SMART goal or steps outlined in the plan. Summary answers are incomplete. The SMART Goal is not: -Specific -Measurable -Attainable -Relevant -Timebound Or The Strategy(s)doesn't align with SMART Goal and/or is not realistic. Or Success criteria is not specific and/or measurable Or Timeframe is unrealistic	Action plan or summary answers are not submitted. Or Most of the elements are missing. Or Not all parts of the template are completed.

	Rationale is aligned with SMART goal and is relevant to the context of the educator. And Part 3-Summary is completed thoughtfully and answers all questions. And Evidence that educator took the time to reflect on the results of the implementation. And Modifications and next steps are aligned to the original SMART Goal, are grade- level appropriate and realistic.	Or Rationale is not aligned with SMART goal and/or is not relevant to the context of the educator Or Part 3-Summary is not completed thoughtfully and not all questions are answered. Or There is no evidence that educator took the time and effort to reflect on the results of the implementation and/or modifications. Or Next steps are not aligned to the original SMART Goal, and are not grade- level appropriate and/or realistic.	

Part 3 Reflection

(500 words)
Use the word count as a guide to write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. For tips on writing a good reflection, review this resource: How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

1. After completing this micro-credential, has your idea of a safe and equitable learning environment changed?
2. How were your students impacted by the changes you implemented?
3. How will you use the data to make changes in your future practice?

Passing: Reflection provides evidence that this activity has had a positive impact on both educator practice and student success. Specific examples to support claims are cited from personal or work-related experiences. Also included are specific actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.