



Language Matters Guiding Beliefs

"Our words can shape identities. What we say to others can deeply affect their sense of who they are and who they might become."

Paula Denton, The Power of our Words

"One needs to be anti-racist, in order to pursue racial justice, and achieve liberation. The work of transformational change and social justice begins with the examination of self/self-awareness and the adoption of commonly understood and aligned language."

A KIPP Public Schools Equity Glossary

- **Common Language:** The work of racial equity and transformational change does not happen without the adoption of commonly understood and aligned language. We share [common understanding of terms](#) used to discuss racist policies and issues of equity and inclusion and revise and change language where it is not aligned or reflective of anti-racist ideas and policies.
- **People first:** We celebrate people as complex with unique strengths, self-identity, cultural norms, perspectives, bias and intersectionality. We do not use surface level terms (gender, race, ability, or age) to describe each other, as we are more than these descriptors. *EX. The black lady on my staff, the handicapped boy at my school.* We believe that it is not up to us to determine how a person or a community wants to be referred to and will listen and respect their preferences.
- **Words matter:** Not only do terms and expressions allow people or groups to feel excluded, but they can also convey or embed stereotypes, expectations or limitations. We make our language and our message as inclusive as possible. We avoid language that excludes others based on gender, race, ability, or age based on stereotyped or discriminatory language. We work to eliminate exclusionary barriers for non-english speakers. (multi-language speakers)
- **Language changes:** Current language reflects dominant white culture values. As we work to become culturally competent, we embrace the historical, current and evolving norms that deem what is socially and grammatically acceptable. We stay informed of new words, concepts, and trends that impact our work as educators and teammates who are Black, Indigenous or People of Color.
- **Mindset matters:** We are aware of our biases and work towards cultural competence by having a curious, non-judgemental and empathetic mindset. We recognize that most acceptable means of communication and language reflect the values and norms of the [white dominant culture](#), and are not always inclusive of our students and teammates who are Black, Indigenous or People of Color. We strive for critical consciousness through education, discourse and experiences that help us stand up against racist ideas and policies.
- **Generalizations, prejudiced language, or stereotypes:** We are cautious about making sweeping statements about any group of people. This includes making personal assumptions based on gender, culture, ancestry, age and other categories. We challenge the language of dominant white culture and educate ourselves about what words, phrases, or perspectives may be offensive to others.
- **Self-reflection:** We practice self-awareness when we use words in speaking and writing. We pause and examine if implicit bias, use of white culture values or microaggressions are present in our language, both written and spoken. We ask ourselves if there is a more inclusive way to state what we are trying to say. We listen and reflect on feedback from differing perspectives.
- **Non-Verbal Language:** Bias and microaggressions are not only communicated through speaking and writing but through our facial expressions, body positioning and gestures. We use non-verbal communication that is neutral, open and free of judgment.