

Proposals for an Inclusive, Culturally Responsive School

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Working and learning at the Crestone Charter School (CCS) means interacting with a wide variety of people. The school has explicit diversity-focused Ends Policies that guide the teaching and culture at CCS. Still, there are aspects of the school that are exclusionary and are not culturally responsive; examples are programmatic, policy, and student-related. As the director of the school, research-based steps are being taken to improve the community-centered nature of the school in response to stakeholder feedback and reflection.

CCS states in one of our learning areas from Ends #2 that students graduate with cultural awareness. Ends #4 describes the virtue of Respect as honoring ourselves and others, including “diversity in learning styles, age, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity to build bridges and to remove barriers in the understanding of others.” It goes on to describe the learning at CCS with a “focus on:

- (1) Students respect and celebration of each other’s individuality,
- (2) Advocacy of self and others,
- (3) Practice of diplomacy, collaboration and cooperation.....
- (4) Mutually respectful, diplomatic communication,
- (5) Shared exploration of diverse world views.....
- (6) A learning community that supports and models tolerance, interdependence, respect and restorative social justice practices,
- (7) Engaging in proactive steps to witness and dismantle systematic or underlying racism and injustice, and

(8) Finding value in multiple cultural legacies; honoring the voices and viewpoints of the oppressed or under-represented.” (Crestone Charter School Governing Council, 2020, Pg 44-46)

These Ends clearly show the diversity and equity- focused nature of the school.

To achieve these Ends set forth by the School’s Governing Council, my predecessors and I have determined the Means, including writing operational policies and procedures, employee and student-parent handbooks, and guiding instruction at the school through hiring and professional development of teachers, curriculum selection, and program components and approaches. Directors of the Crestone Charter School must work with the parents, families, and community to achieve these Ends, through two-way communication, transparency, gathering stakeholder input, implementing equitably, and reflecting on outcomes.

If done well this leads to a culturally responsive school with a school culture that is representative of the community and specifically the stakeholders. Crestone is a remote, rural town of under 2000 permanent residents, so our 103 students and their families are a major portion of the community. We are a diverse population spiritually, economically, politically, and to a lesser degree, racially. To be culturally responsive here means that we are aware of the religious diversity at the post office, the garden center catering to the flower gardeners and the pot growers, the food stampers and the trust funders, the owner builders and the spec home buyers, and the diverse views on what school should be, look like, and teach. To be inclusive of all this, I must be conscious with my words in my newspaper articles and weekly email updates. I must open the doors to all and greet them with smiles, when we host a parent night I must provide child care and a meal, and know that some are coming more for that than the informational session itself. And I too must be as ready to listen, as to share, in my communications and at our events. In this way, I try to be inclusive and culturally responsive.

One way I am guiding the school to be more responsive is based on a [recent activity survey](#) that I got a 90% response rate; our Friday experiential programming days require too many personal funds for many. The younger students learn to swim at a local pool and this costs \$60-100 per child. Our ski and snowboard program at a local mountain resort runs from \$170-375 per child. Our spring travel programming, designed for all children K-12, scaled by grade band, can cost up to \$1000 per child for the odd-year international trips. To make these programs more affordable and inclusive, I have created a sliding-scale scholarship program. Last year we provided from 0 to 100% funding for ski passes, averaging 50% of every pass paid for by the school, and arranged for an equipment swap and sale saving on average 50% of rental costs for families to own their children's set of gear. Lastly we instituted an alternate winter program, both for those not interested in skiing or swimming (9 out of 70) and for those who could not afford it even with the scholarships (1 out of 70). For the 24/25 school year I recommend increasing the scholarship budget so that all who want to ski and swim can. For the travel program, we have had success with classroom-based fundraising efforts that develop the student's teamwork in preparation for the trip, and we have also had the school act as a jobs clearinghouse to help students find work to pay their personal shares. While ALL students must participate in the classroom fundraising, there are inequities between the haves and the have-nots in terms of the amount of personal work students need to do for their own shares. Last year, 24 out of 27 students participated in the trip to Puerto Rico. While providing school funding for scholarships is not a research-based response, and therefore does not have a citation, it is a practical, and well-utilized solution that leveled the field for families that needed support to participate in the program.

A second area that needs to be addressed is our Gender Policy, written for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in our school community. This Policy was written in 2018 and needs to be updated to be in compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, other federal laws, and state law. Title IX was re-written in 2020 (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2020) and again 2024 (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2024), and Colorado wrote state statute in 2022 (**Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-1-143.1-D-IV**) that address employee and student non-discrimination. The Crestone Charter School does not discriminate and prohibits discrimination based on a person's perceived or actual protected status, which includes disability, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, family composition, religion, age, national origin, or ancestry in any education program or activity that it operates. Under state law, it is discriminatory for an individual to knowingly or intentionally use a name other than the student's chosen name or to knowingly or intentionally engage in the avoidance or refusal to use a student's chosen name when the student has chosen a name to better reflect their gender identity. The CCS policy provides guidelines for students and staff, definitions, privacy expectations, official records, name and pronoun usage, activities, bathrooms, PE and sports, extracurriculars, overnight trips, dress codes, and of course, discrimination and harassment. While this policy is a good start to helping all students feel comfortable and safe in their learning environment, views and language have changed and as well as the law, and I propose that the policy needs to be re-written and updated to better reflect current needs of transgender and gender non-conforming students. I do not have research-based documentation for this need to further cultural responsiveness, however I have been instructed by my school's legal council that to be in compliance with the law **Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-1-143.3-A**, district policy needs to be up to date

by 7/1/2024 (Colorado State Legislature, n.d.), and therefore the CCS guidelines should also be updated.

The last area in need of being more culturally responsive is in the HS learning environment where students regularly make ableist, sexist, homophobic, racist, religious, and nationalistic comments or use derogatory slurs in these areas. The pattern is that these comments are made discretely, are heard about second hand, are unattributed, or veiled through other obfuscation. There is gender, racial, cultural, and religious diversity in the high school student body and still these comments are made. To remedy this situation I propose that there is a series of Restorative Circles for students to share their perspectives and to establish agreements in line with our Ends Policies and our school virtues of Integrity and Respect. This is supported in the conclusion of *White Fragility* (DiAngelo & DiAngelo, 2018, Pg 153), particularly if we substitute ANY -ism for 'racism' in this passage: "Interrupting racism takes courage and intentionality; the interruption is by definition not passive or complacent.... We must never consider ourselves finished with our learning. [We must] continue to receive feedback on my [our] stubborn patterns and unexamined assumptions; that is necessary to align my professional values with my real action." Restorative Circles will interrupt the behaviors in the HS students.

This week's discussion prompt shows me the breadth of experience among this cohort of principal candidates. Original posts and follow-up discussion shows a caring and progressive movement to bring equity to our schools. In my post I question how this would be perceived by conservative candidates, districts, and groups, and if it is aligned with the principal quality standards; this process has informed my understanding of the importance of inclusive practices in creating a culturally responsive school. Confirmation bias? Maybe, but as a white cisgender

male, I prefer to defer to those with the lived experience, rather than consider myself the expert of what is best for folks different than me.

References

- Colorado State Legislature. (n.d.). *Section 22-1-143 - Harassment or discrimination - policy required - training and notification - definitions*, Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-1-143. Casetext. Retrieved September 25, 2024, from <https://casetext.com/statute/colorado-revised-statutes/title-22-education/general-and-administrative/article-1-general-provisions/section-22-1-143-harassment-or-discrimination-policy-required-training-and-notification-definitions>
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Reflect on your current school context, including policies, processes, structures, approaches, curriculum, instruction, and how your school works with parents, families, and communities.

Part 1: Write a proposal that you could share with your school's administration that includes the following:

- A clear definition of a culturally responsive school/school culture and inclusionary vs. exclusionary practices.
- At least three recommendations for making your school more culturally responsive.
- A clear rationale for each of these recommendations.
- At least one resource to support each recommendation (this can be an article, web resource, framework, video, etc.).

Part 2: Reflect on how this week's discussion and your peers' feedback informed your proposal and your understanding of what makes a school culturally responsive and what the shift from exclusionary to inclusionary practices looks like.

Submissions and Guidelines

- Your paper should be 3-5 pages in length