

Diversity Today = Success Tomorrow

According to a study published in *Scientific American*, being around people who are different from us actually makes us more creative, more diligent, and more productive. It's easy to see the importance of diversity in the workplace; we grow by learning from those around us who perform at a higher skill level. Diverse experiences, backgrounds, and viewpoints foster creativity. Diverse perspectives lead to better decision making and problem solving. This concept is based on decades of research from scientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, and demographers.

Diversity is necessary to build innovative teams or organizations. Diversity sometimes may result in differences of opinion - but that's not always a bad thing. Studies on group cohesiveness and productivity have revealed that non-diverse groups focus strictly on facts – and lack creativity. And a lack of creativity leads to a lack of problem solving. As Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, once said, “strength lies in differences, not similarities.”

Why do we think differently when it comes to social diversity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation? Some studies show that social diversity leads to discomfort, disrespect, disregard, and disunion, among other problems. In giving in to that discomfort, we cheat ourselves and our children out of becoming more creative, more productive, and smarter!

How can we foster successfully diverse learning environments in our schools?

- Encourage all families to actively participate in their children's education and school community.
- Open a dialogue for parents or guardians to share knowledge about their students' lives, interests, hopes and struggles.
- Invite parents or guardians to share information about family cultures and traditions.
- Recognize and respect differences in family structures and cultures.
- Understand the role that identity and background may play in shaping relationships between teachers and families.
- Bring a sense of self-reflection and cultural humility to all conversations and interactions.
- View linguistic, cultural and family diversity as strengths.
- Get involved with your school's cultural fair or assembly. If the school does not have one, work with your PTA or parent group to organize an International Cultural Fair or similar event.
- Ask if your school is a certified “No Place for Hate School.” The No Place for Hate initiative is designed to rally a school around the goal of creating a welcoming community dedicated to stopping all forms of bias and bullying. Find the No Place for Hate website at http://atlanta.adl.org/npvh_/npvh/.

An attitude of inclusion is critical for our children and their future. It is important for a safe and welcoming school environment, to foster a culture of respect, and to encourage the creativity and innovation that is inspired by different perspectives and ideas. With the expanding accessibility of the Internet, ease of travel, and the increasingly mobile nature of society, our world is flattening. We experience and are exposed to more social diversity than our parents, and our children will experience a different, more diverse world than we can imagine. We can prepare our children for tomorrow by exposure to, respect for and interaction with a diverse group of friends, coworkers and fellow students.