



# CREATING A DISTRICT CULTURE OF INCLUSION



LEADERSHIP  
EXCELLERATION

## BACKGROUND

Wyoming City Schools has been recognized as a high-performing district at the local, state and national levels for many years. The district has demonstrated a commitment to a whole-child education through rigorous academic course options, strong music and art education programs, numerous clubs, service learning opportunities, project-based activities, and athletics. All of this takes place with the continuing, strong support of a community that values public education.

Wyoming City School District serves nearly 2000 students (23% are racially diverse and 77% are white). Recognizing the challenge for all students across our nation to become globally competent, Wyoming has embarked on an initiative for staff, students, administrators, parents, and community. We believe that our schools and community should acknowledge and demonstrate an awareness of and appreciation for individual differences while working to create a universally embracing and welcoming environment.

The Culture of Inclusion on the Pathway to Global Competency Project began in January 2018. Superintendent Dr. Susan Lang assembled a pilot group comprised of community members, teachers, administrators, and board members to complete six months of training on Cultural Intelligence that include: Cultural Awareness, Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Strategies, and Cultural Action. After the group completed this intensive training and reflection, it was clear that Wyoming was ready to take this initiative on at a broader level.

The long-term goal of the project is to train all staff in Cultural Intelligence in the 2018-2019 school year to enhance our learning environment. The ability to adapt our behavior and change mindsets, in order to treat others with dignity and respect, will move us beyond tolerance and understanding to embrace inclusion, which is our desired outcome. Dr. David Livermore, one of the foremost experts on cultural intelligence, is a frequent advisor and speaker to government agencies, fortune 500 companies and charitable organizations around the world. Dr. Livermore has said that “Cultural Intelligence is a set of skills that facilitates effective cross-cultural management. Those characteristics will lead to respect among a multitude of cultures on a daily basis” (Livermore, 2010). As a result, our Wyoming students will be prepared to become leaders who have a growth mindset, possess an interest in different cultures and improved language skills, and have the capacity to work productively in cross-cultural interactions and on teams.

During one of our training sessions, the Cincinnati USA Hispanic Chamber presented their purpose and some historical information. Luz Elena Schemmel, Director of Santa Maria Mission, shared the importance that students understand how different immigrant groups struggle with acceptance and equality. She noted that the city of Cincinnati has been enriched over time by Italians, French, Greeks, Hispanics Eastern Europeans, Africans, Asians, Muslims, and the many other groups that have called our region home. All have contributed tremendously to Cincinnati’s rich cultural diversity.



“The Wyoming community has a rich history of valuing tradition and progress and we look forward to being a leader in the area of Cultural Intelligence and Inclusion for other school districts around the country.”

- Dr. Sue Lang,  
Superintendent,  
Wyoming City Schools

## THE CHALLENGE

It is vital to create a culture of inclusion as schools are rapidly becoming more culturally diverse. Culturally competent teachers are better equipped to reach students and families which in turn increases respect and mutual understanding among all involved. Students are better prepared for transformational change in the world after graduation by increasing their capacity for problem-solving and innovation through new awareness, insights, ideas, and strategies. In *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*, Dr. Livermore share that “With cultural intelligence, we can engage in our rapidly shrinking world with an underlying sense of mutual respect and dignity for people everywhere” (Livermore, 2010).

Cultural intelligence is an essential capability in our schools because it allows administrators, teachers, staff and students to acquire new behavior and change mindsets, in order to treat others with dignity and respect, and to move beyond tolerance to inclusion. Dr. Livermore, In *Driven by Difference*, said, “Culturally intelligent innovation begins with changing our impulse from, why can’t you see it like I do? to help me see what I might be missing!” (Livermore, 2016)

Dr. Lang embarked on a journey to create a culture of inclusion in Wyoming City Schools. She understands that this is a fundamental culture change requiring a multi-year initiative to achieve her vision that every student who graduates from Wyoming city schools has the global mindsets, tool sets and skill sets to seek and create inclusion in the world.

Parents, community members, teachers, staff, and students of Wyoming City Schools were asked in focus groups to share opportunities to enhance inclusion. The results were profoundly helpful:

### Communication

- Create constant and consistent communication and responses through all the district, with transparent message.
- Foster open and honest communication and dialogue about diversity and student needs.
- Encourage teachers to listen (and act upon) parents’ thoughts.
- Share personal experiences from staff, students, parents and community.
- Increase teachers’ and students’ communication across cultural borders and between friend groups.
- Dialogue about the problems, about how culture affects people, about sexuality and gender.
- Talk to students - teachers/administrators.
- Ask questions.

### Cultural Knowledge

- Increase cultural knowledge through experience.
- Begin with earlier grade levels.
- Celebrate diversity. It is worth the time and money; it is educational.
- Expand Everybody Counts program.
- Respond to the need for authentic inclusion and acceptance.

### Social Media Challenges

- Encourage genuine relationships; no phones when learning about inclusion.
- Address challenges with Social Media usage.

- Foster empathy with a new social media strategy. Empathy is a uniquely human trait and students see that technology is getting in the way.

### **Staff / Program / Teaching Support**

- Have teachers participate in planning and listen to their opinions.
- Provide professional development on: differences, mental health issues, disability, cultural practices / values, all Inclusion topics, current issues (i.e. gender / sexual orientation), cultural education.
- Educate through the use of presenters, change leaders sharing experiences and providing training, not just a program for staff to read.
- Engage staff collaboration and empowerment.
- Expose local cultural differences with instruction that fosters collaboration.
- Provide teachers cultural competency training.
- Educate teachers on how to stop racial comments and what they are.
- Ensure more staff diversity among educators.
- Provide teachers more experiences to stop racism/intolerance and identify emotional distress or needs.
- Initiate more education for the staff about inclusion and diversity.

### **Education Opportunities**

- Encourage curiosity of cultural differences in an exciting way.
- Continue the work; this is not a one and done program.
- Build a culture of willingness for students to know and accept others.
- Build awareness of different professions and diversity training for students given by trained professionals.
- Teach empathy.
- Create more understanding and teach current events from an inclusive perspective with knowledge of other cultures to help reduce the use of stereotypes.
- Foster more cultural teaching and increase diversity classes.
- Start with Parent education.

Wyoming City School Board Member and Subject Matter Expert, Illya Thomas, shared the importance of inclusive education for use at home by parents and in school by educators and administrators. Mr. Thomas indicated that students benefit from great examples as well as educational experiences that foster inclusion.



“It is critical that parents, teachers and administrators intentionally take steps to become aware of our unconscious biases. It’s the only way for parents to avoid passing on beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate discrimination, and for teachers to know when to take a stand to embody a culture of inclusion. This creates the opportunity for all our children to know they are valued and to perform at their peak.”

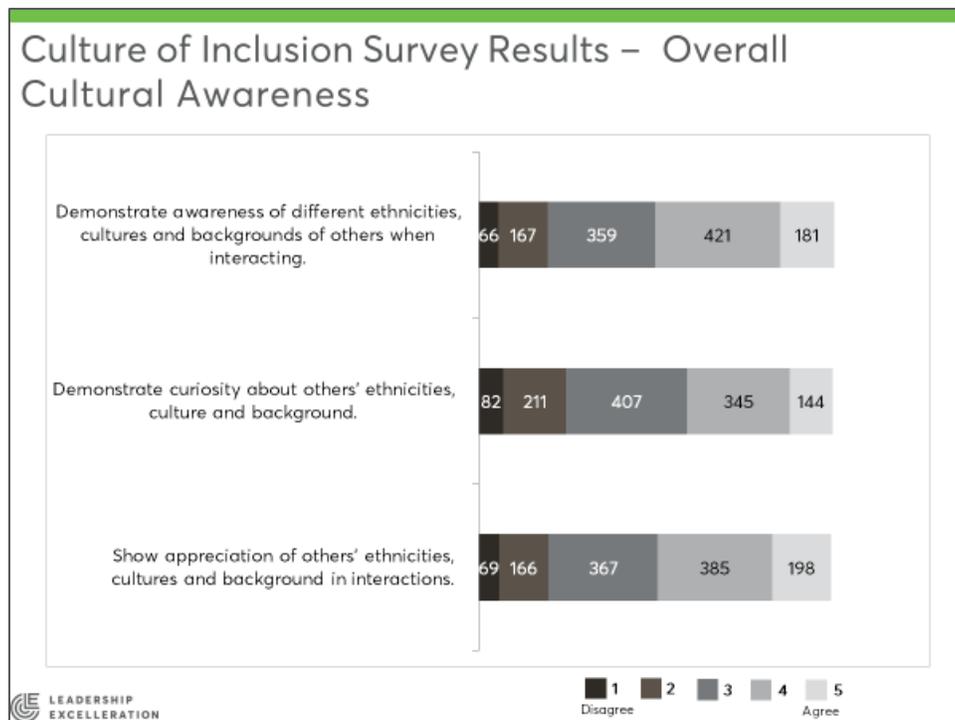
- Illya Thomas,  
Board Member  
Wyoming City Schools

## THE GAME PLAN

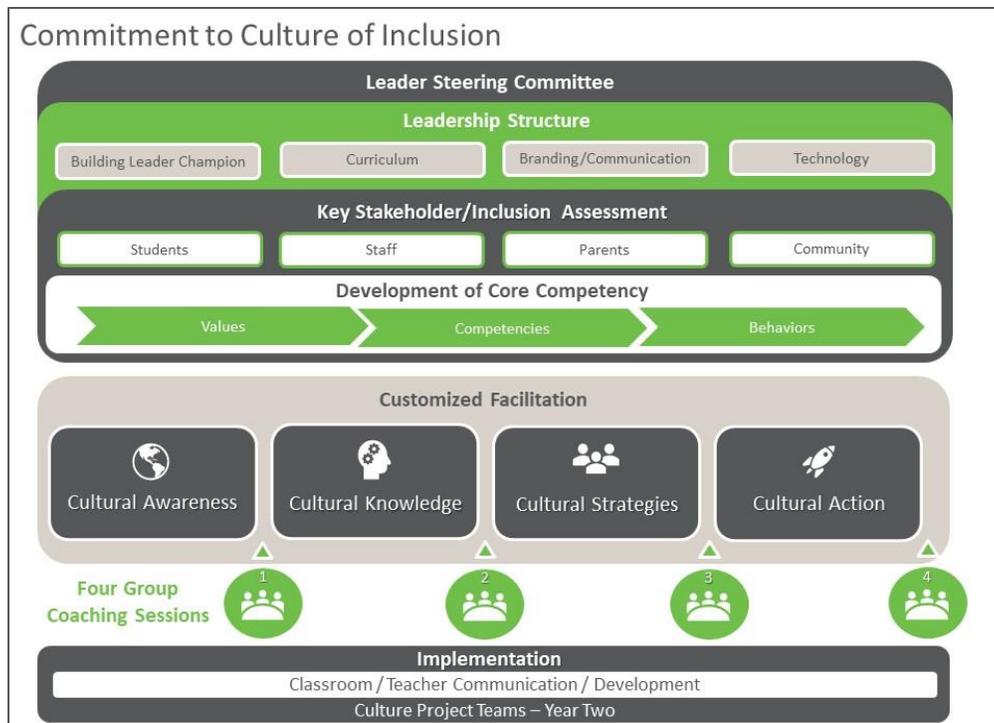
The first step along the journey for Wyoming City Schools was to define what would occur in Phase I and Phase II. The first part of Phase I involved establishing a Steering Committee and defining the leadership structure. The leadership structure included Board Members, Parents, Administrators, Principals and Teachers. Competencies were then identified and defined for Cultural intelligence by the District to include: Cultural Awareness, Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Strategies, Cultural Action. The four-session series consisted of half-day sessions and each session focused on one specific competency.

Once the competencies were established, a Culture of Inclusion survey was administered to students, staff. Focus groups were conducted and the needs identified were related to communication, cultural knowledge, social media challenges, staff/program/teaching support, and educational opportunities.

The results from the survey and focus groups guided the development of customized content for the series, which highlighted areas that needed enhancement in the District.



The four-session Culture of inclusion series was launched in February 2018 and concluded in May 2018. In between each session, a group coaching session was conducted to ensure application of the learnings from the prior session.



After the series was completed, it was then time to discuss what would occur in Phase II. Phase II will equip the teachers with the mindsets, tool sets, and skill sets based on best practice learning and practice to continue the commitment to having an inclusive culture.



There will be two-hour sessions in Cultural Awareness, Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Strategies, and Cultural Action followed by two-hour break-out practice sessions to support teachers and staff to build the capacity to foster an inclusive culture in the classroom and across the District.

The focus groups helped leaders and teachers to identify the top three opportunities to be more inclusive on a daily basis. As a result of this development process, teachers will be equipped to:

- Note and address language among students that is divisive and intervene with one to one coaching.
- Be aware of team and group activities when students are consistently not included and take action.
- Proactively listen for behavior between students on school property and at school events that is inappropriate and divisive and address it.

## THE RESULTS

As a result of the pilot program, the Wyoming Parents, Leaders and Educators who participated are dedicated to advancing a culture of inclusion.

Some results of the Culture of Inclusion Survey are below.

Strengths to build upon...

Top three “agree with” statements:

- Seek understanding to interact well with others regardless of religion.
- Seek understanding to interact well with others regardless of culture.
- Seek understanding to interact well with others regardless of race.

Growth areas to include...

Top three “disagree with” statements:

- Take action to create a universally inclusive environment by demonstrating proactive behavior.
- Demonstrate curiosity about others’ ethnicities, culture and background.
- Take action to reach out to those not included, with open, welcoming, inclusive behaviors.

Teacher and Staff engagement, involvement and open-minded participation in the Culture of Inclusion sessions is vital to Wyoming City Schools success and the experience of all students.

## IN SUMMARY

It takes three years to transform a culture to be more inclusive of every leader, staff member, student, parent, and community member; it is critical for all stakeholders to share this extended commitment to change to ensure success. Participating enthusiastically and embracing a growth mindset makes a more inclusive culture possible.

Each student deserves to be welcomed and included regardless of differences. Modeling inclusive behavior and expecting it of students will create a transformation and put Wyoming City Schools on a Path to Global Competence.



“The learning from this program provides an excellent opportunity to create an inclusive culture that helps our students embrace diversity within the classroom and beyond. This builds upon work we are already doing on a daily basis to foster respect, pride, and collaboration among our students.”

- Richard Schaeen,  
Elm Primary School,  
Wyoming City Schools

**References:**

Livermore, D. (2016). *Driven by difference: How great companies fuel innovation through diversity*. New York City, NY: AMACON.

Livermore, D. (2010). *Leading with cultural intelligence: The real secret to success*. New York City, NY: AMACON.