



# Protect Crucial Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Educator Preparation to Ensure Georgia Classrooms Are Safe and Inclusive for All Students

**IDRA Testimony submitted by Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, July 13, 2023**

Good Afternoon, my name is Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed. I am the Georgia Director of Advocacy for IDRA, an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. I am a former high school math teacher, and I am also here representing the Georgia Coalition for Education Justice, a coalition of more than 200 students, parents, educators, and community members from across the state, many of whom would have liked to be here today but were not able to come to downtown metro Atlanta in the middle of a workday with only two days' notice.

I am here to share our opposition to the 47 proposed educational preparation rule changes. We are deeply concerned that the removal of language regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-bias, and culturally responsive practices signals a retreat from the commitment to serve every Georgia student and applies an inherently deficit-based lens to the unique traits each child brings into our classrooms every day. We are further concerned that these changes will not only harm our students but will also have a detrimental impact on the recruitment and retention of educators, particularly educators of color, educators who are disabled, and educators who identify as LGBTQ+.

I started teaching in 2016, which is coincidentally the year when much of this language was first added to the rules. When I first started teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy and DEI were not a normalized part of the professional development process. I only received access to these concepts from training sessions through outside organizations that I often had to seek out for myself.

It is hard to exactly capture how this may have hurt my classroom, but we know that students whose teachers incorporate their background, identities, and social context into the curriculum, report greater interest in school, feelings of belonging, and more acceptance of others (Byrd, 2016). I know that I saw incredible growth and benefits after I began incorporating these evidence-based practices into my classroom. That is why it so crucial that we incorporate these practices into every classroom across the state, and why their removal will be detrimental to our children's ultimate success.

By deliberately removing key concepts that equip educators with the training and guidance necessary to not only support diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environments, but also to

proactively work to eliminate bias and embrace cultural competency, the Commission reduces opportunities for Georgia's students and families to receive a high-quality public education tailored to the needs of the child (Reynolds, et al., 2017).

We ask that the Commission prioritize the needs of Georgia's students, the majority of whom are students of color and will be directly impacted by this proposal.

Retreating from the explicit commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in educator preparation will not just hurt students, but also our teachers. Georgia's teacher workforce is becoming increasingly diverse (University of Georgia, 2022). This is a promising trend because we know that students have shown higher academic achievement when they have teachers who reflect their own identities (Gershenson, et al., 2017). We also know that teachers, particularly diverse teachers, are more likely to stay in school environments where they feel recognized and supported (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Eliminating guidance on DEI from the professional standards will leave administrators poorly equipped to support our diverse educator workforce. With increasing teacher shortages, particularly the increasing turnover of Black & brown educators, we must reaffirm our commitment to equip all educators with the skills and knowledge to create a safe & inclusive learning environment.

The chair has repeatedly said that this is not meant to be interpreted as a lowering of standards, but the precedent for discrimination is already set. We have decades of history that show us what happens when we are not intentional about including EVERY child, and these changes move us back in that direction. We urge the Commission to reject these changes, by voting NO to the proposed rules and stand firm in our commitment to serving the diverse children and families of Georgia.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact me at [mikayla.arciaga@idra.org](mailto:mikayla.arciaga@idra.org).

## Resources

- Byrd, C.M. (2016). Does Culturally Relevant Teaching Work? An Examination From Student Perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016660744>
- Reynolds, K.J., Lee, E., Turner, I., Bromhead, D., & Subasic, E. (2017). How Does School Climate Impact Academic Achievement? An Examination of Social Identity Processes. *School Psychology International*, 38(1), 4-6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0143034316682295>
- University of Georgia (2022). Teacher Burnout Report. Georgia Department of Education. <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Burnout%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf>
- Gershenson, S., Hart, C., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C., & Papageorge, N. (2022). The Long-run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*. 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20190573>.
- Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/559.310>
- Carver-Thomas, D. (2017). Review: Diversifying the Field – Barriers to Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color and How to Overcome Them. IDRA. <https://www.idra.org/support/literature-review-diversifying-the-field-barriers-to-recruiting-and-retaining-teachers-of-color-and-how-to-overcome-them/>

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