

Policies valuing cultural diversity improve minority students' sense of belonging

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Societies and schools are facing new, culturally diverse populations and how they respond to these changes can have lasting impacts for everyone involved. Examining middle school diversity policies, a team of researchers from the University of Leuven, Belgium and the Queen's University Belfast, UK, found that in schools with multicultural-based

policies, ethnic minority students achieved just as well and felt that they belonged just as much as their majority peers. They also found that in schools that ignore or reject diversity, ethnic minority students had worse grades and felt that they belonged less in the school than their majority peers.

"Approaches that ignore diversity, with rhetoric like 'I don't see color', or those that reject diversity, such as banning headscarves, may intend to minimize discrimination, but in reality these approaches can be harmful for marginalized groups," says Dr. Laura Celeste a social and cultural psychology researcher and lead author of the study.

The research appears in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, a publication of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

Much of the prior work on assimilation, diversity, and immigration, comes from a North American perspective, according to Celeste and colleagues. They wanted to understand the European experience, which has its own cultural identities, histories, and experiences.

The psychologists assessed policies at over 60 Belgian middle schools, as well as a total of 1,747 minority and 1,384 majority students' school belonging and achievement (self-reported grades) 1 year later.

They found in their initial assessments that [minority students](#) reported significantly less belonging ($M = 3.52$) and [lower grades](#) ($M = 59.28$) than majority peers ($M = 3.70$ and $M = 63.14$), respectively. In schools with "multiculturalism" policies, minority students reported higher class grades by the end of the year and those with "colorblindness" policies actually saw grades go down among minority students.

Celeste and colleagues note that other research tracking middle through

[high school students](#) shows that those who feel less belonging in school are "at risk of disengagement, underachievement, and early [school](#) leaving, with lasting consequences for their future life chances in our post-industrial economies."

"These results are also in line with previous research that shows, for instance, how workplace diversity policies can affect relational and performance-related outcomes in organizations," says Celeste.

More information: Laura Celeste, Gülseli Baysu, Karen Phalet, Loes Meeussen, and Judit Kende. Can School Diversity Policies Reduce Belonging and Achievement Gaps Between Minority and Majority Youth? Multiculturalism, Colorblindness, and Assimilationism Assessed. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Online before print April 24, 2019.

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