



CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

CENTERING CULTURE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY RESOURCE GUIDE

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Introduction

Every classroom and workplace is filled with people who carry powerful stories, languages, and traditions from their families and communities. For many Native American, Latiné, Filipino, Indian, Black, and transnational youth, these cultural strengths are central to who they are. Yet, too often, schools and workplaces overlook these assets or send the message that people must set them aside in order to succeed. *Centering Culture in Your Professional Journey* was created to challenge that message. It affirms that culture, language, and tradition are not obstacles but powerful sources of strength. This guide was created with CISD students for CISD students. It offers suggestions for how to take pride in your cultural wealth, build confidence in who you are, and connect your lived experiences to your future academic and career pathways.

Just as important, this guide encourages schools to act as true partners with families and communities. When educators create space for students to share their stories and honor their cultural knowledge, they send the message that identity is not separate from learning or success, it is central to it. Through reflection activities, storytelling, and practical tools, this resource helps build stronger bridges between school, home, and community with our high school youth at the center.

Most importantly, this guide is an invitation: for students to build on the the cultural capital they already carry, and for schools to work alongside families in preparing young people to thrive in every setting. When culture is embraced as an asset, students are able to move forward with pride, resilience, and purpose.



How to use this guide:

This resource is designed to be flexible and interactive. Each section includes links that highlight the strengths students bring with them. Educators can use it:

- **In the classroom**, to engage in activities or spark conversations that help students connect identity with learning.
- **In advising or mentoring**, to support students as they plan for college, careers, or other postsecondary pathways.
- **In partnership with families**, to affirm that schools value and build on the cultural knowledge already present in students' lives.



Students can use this guide to:

- **Affirm Cultural Identity:** Understand and take pride in your cultural backgrounds.
- **View Culture as Capital:** Learn to use language, tradition, and heritage as professional assets.
- **Know Your Rights:** Learn about bias and discrimination and your rights in the workplace.
- **Develop Professional Skills:** Guidance for finding a job or internship, creating a resume and cover letter and preparing for a job in a way that builds on your cultural wealth.

Whether you use the guide as a whole or draw from individual sections, the goal remains the same: to affirm culture as a source of power and to prepare young people to thrive wherever their journeys take them.

NOTE: Throughout this guide, arrows indicate clickable links to videos and resources, and each small circle is also clickable.

Note to Teachers & Administrators

Ya'at'eeh, Hola, Namaskaram, Kumusta, Hi/Hello!

This guide was designed not only for students, but with students. During CISD's Summer 2025 Research Institute, a group of diverse high school students helped shape the very sections you see here. They shared their insights, reflected on their experiences, and gave feedback on what topics felt most important for their success. Their voices guided the structure and focus of this resource, ensuring that it speaks to the real challenges and strengths young people carry into schools and workplaces.



As teachers, counselors, and mentors, you play a vital role in how students see their own cultural knowledge reflected in learning spaces. This guide is meant to support you in creating environments where students feel seen, valued, and empowered to bring their whole selves into their academic and career journeys. Use the activities to spark conversation, the stories to build connection, and the strategies to partner with families and communities in affirming culture as a strength.

Most importantly, approach this resource as a living conversation. The students who shaped it remind us that identity and culture are always growing, and so too are the ways schools can support them.

Ahehee', Salamat, Gracias, Dhanyavaadalu, Thank you!



Section 1: Who Am I? Building a Strong Self-Identity



Before stepping into any workplace or professional setting, it's important to understand and celebrate who you are. This section invites you to reflect on your personal history, values, language, and traditions/elements that shape your identity and make you unique. Through journaling, storytelling, and cultural exploration, you'll begin to see that your background is not something to set aside, but a powerful source of strength and perspective. Knowing yourself is the first step to advocating for yourself and thriving in any space you enter.

As you move through this document, click on the images for links and resources.

Key Topics:



- Exploring your personal history, language, and traditions as sources of strength
- Understanding identity as the values, family, and experiences that shape who you are
- Building confidence and self-advocacy through cultural pride
- Honoring family and ancestral teachings that guide your journey

When we understand ourselves, we can better understand others. For many students, self-identity begins with family teachings: the way your grandparents greet visitors, the recipes passed down at holidays, the songs sung during long drives, or the laughter that fills your kitchen. These are not small details; they are evidence of cultural continuity. Recognizing them helps you move through new environments like college, jobs, or leadership roles, without losing what matters most.

What is identity?

Identity is the combination of everything that makes you who you are. It is your values, interests, languages, family, community, and the experiences that have shaped you. It includes how you see yourself and how the world sometimes sees you. As you step into the workplace or college, understanding your identity helps you make choices that align with who you are. It reminds you that your culture, voice, and background are strengths, not things to hide or change to fit in. Knowing who you are gives you the confidence to speak up, work with others respectfully, and stay grounded even when you're in unfamiliar spaces. Knowing yourself lays a foundation for making decisions and choosing pathways. It helps you make choices aligned with your beliefs and respond to bias or misunderstanding without shrinking who you are. Identity work also keeps your ancestors' lessons alive while preparing you to mentor those who follow.

Here are some ways you can use the links below:

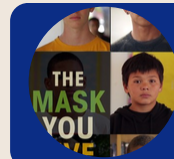
Personal Identity Wheel Lesson: Explore all the parts of who you are and reflect on which ones you share or keep private.



Toolkit for “Invisible Identity”: Learn how to recognize parts of identity that others may overlook or misunderstand, and why visibility matters.



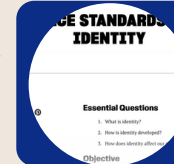
The Mask You Live In: Watch a short film that explores how gender stereotypes can limit who you are and how you express ourselves.



Translanguaging – Language Identity: This may seem more appropriate for teachers to implement; however, as a student, think about how using all your languages freely (English, Spanish, Diné bizaad, etc.) is a sign of strength and intelligence.



Unpacking Identity - Social Justice Standards: Reflect on identity, fairness, and respect. How can we create spaces where everyone belongs?



Identity Activities and Lesson Plans – IndigNM: Explore Indigenous youth stories and projects from across New Mexico that celebrate culture and identity.



When you know your story, you walk into every room with purpose. Your identity is a compass that grounds you in who you are and points you toward who you are becoming.

Research Articles:

García, O., & Kley, T.(2022). Translanguaging and transformative teaching for emergent bilingual students: Building instructional spaces. This work emphasizes leveraging linguistic identity in education and beyond.

Love, B. L. (2019). We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom. Love argues for culturally grounded identity work as resistance and self-empowerment for youth.



Section 2: Culture as Capital

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Your culture, your language, traditions, values, and ways of knowing-is more than personal history; it's a form of capital. In this section, you'll discover how the skills and knowledge rooted in your cultural background can translate into real strengths in school, work, and leadership. Whether it's bilingual communication, community leadership, storytelling, or artistic expression, your lived experiences carry value. This section will help you recognize these assets, reframe them with confidence, and learn how to speak about them as advantages in your academic and professional journey.

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Key Topics:

- Defining "community cultural wealth"
- Reframing language, community service, and traditional knowledge as strengths
- Linking heritage to career skills

Your culture includes your language, traditions, ways of learning, and community responsibilities. Your culture is more than personal history; it's a powerful form of capital. "Capital" usually means money or resources, but in education and leadership, it also describes the strengths you already carry. The knowledge you've built through family, community, and lived experience is a form of wealth that schools and workplaces often overlook.

As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) explained, cultural capital is what we learn from our families, communities, and experiences, like how we communicate, solve problems, or show respect. These are all forms of social capital too, because they help you build relationships and find your place in the world. In other words, the wisdom you gain from your culture and community is just as valuable as what you learn in school. It's what helps you grow, connect, and succeed.

Think about the lessons learned outside textbooks: helping at community events, translating for elders, caring for siblings, organizing fundraisers, or participating in ceremonies. Each of these moments builds professional skills like communication, time management, leadership, empathy, and creativity. Gaining these skills, and understanding their value can help you in job application and interviews, essays, and team projects, or in the work place in general.

What is community cultural wealth?

Community cultural wealth is a way of understanding the many kinds of knowledge and strengths that come from our families and communities. It reminds us that success isn't only about grades or money and that it's also about the relationships, values, and problem-solving skills we carry with us. For example, when you help your relatives, navigate two languages, or learn from elders, you're building a type of wealth that can't be measured by a paycheck. Scholars like Dr. Tara Yosso (2005) describe this as different forms of wealth, such as linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital, all of which prepare you to thrive in any environment. Recognizing your community cultural wealth means realizing that your background already holds the tools you need to lead, learn, and succeed.

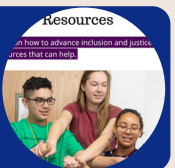
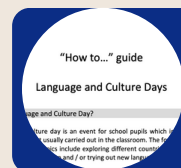
Here are some ways you can use the links below:

Recognizing Community Cultural Wealth in Classrooms: See how your family, language, and community experiences are real strengths in school and work.



What Culture Day Gets Wrong: Learn why culture isn't just for one day, it's part of who you are every day.

How To..." Guide for Language and Culture Days: Get ideas for celebrating culture in ways that are meaningful and respectful.



Youth Celebrate Diversity Resources: Explore youth-led projects that show how diversity builds confidence and leadership.

Indigenous New Mexico – WOW: Discover how Indigenous youth connect traditional knowledge to learning and careers.



Youth-Friendly Culture in the Workplace: Find ways to bring your culture and values to work while showing respect for others

Seeing your culture as capital means valuing what you already know and do. Your stories, relationships, and languages are not side notes on your résumé, they are evidence of resilience, intelligence, and care.

You can start with: Reframing Your Assets Activity

Step 1:

Think about what you do at home, school, or in your community that shows responsibility, creativity, or leadership.

(Examples: helping at ceremonies, taking care of siblings, volunteering, or translating for elders.)

Step 2:

Create a table with two columns and list them with the following heading:

- Column 1: Cultural Experience (what you do)
- Column 2: Transferable Skill or Value (what it teaches you)

Here is an example:

Cultural Experience (What you do)	Transferable Skill or Value (what it teaches you)
Translating for a family member or community member	Communication, patience, and fluency in two languages
Organizing community event	Leadership and planning
Caring for siblings	Responsibility, empathy and balancing competing priorities

Step 3:

Look at your list and notice how many skills you already use every day. These are valuable in school, jobs, and leadership roles.

Step 4:

Use these examples to write strong sentences for résumés, interviews, or scholarship essays.

EXAMPLE:

“By helping organize community events, I developed strong leadership and time-management skills.”

Step 5:

Remember, your culture and experiences are not just part of who you are but they are your strengths. You already carry the skills to succeed anywhere.

Research Articles:

Palmer, R. T., Maramba, D. C., & Dancy, T. E. (2021). Rethinking College Student Development Theory Using Critical Frameworks. Includes cultural wealth and critical race-informed frameworks that help students reframe their assets in professional contexts.

Sanchez, P., & Martinez, A. (2023). Asset-based approaches to bilingual youth engagement in community research. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*. Highlights youth research projects that center heritage as capital.



Section 3: Thriving in the Workplace

This section helps new and young workers recognize bias, understand implicit vs. explicit bias, prevent microaggressions, know their rights under New Mexico and federal EEO laws, and take confident steps to address or report problems.

Key Topics:

- Understanding bias: implicit vs. explicit bias
- Microaggressions and stereotypes as forms of workplace discrimination
- State and federal workplace rights (New Mexico Human Rights Act, EEOC laws)
- Responding to or reporting discrimination

While every workplace is different, you have the right to have your culture, language and traditions respected at work. This section is designed to help you understand bias, know your state and federal rights and build strategies for navigating challenging situations with confidence and dignity.

What is bias?

A bias is an attitude or belief that shapes our behavior. We all have different biases, that help make us who we are- it can be something simple like a preference for engaging in individual sports over team sports. But some biases can create intentional or unintentional harm in how we treat other people. When talking about bias in the workplace, researchers have defined two categories- implicit bias, and explicit bias.

- **Implicit bias** is the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner, which can be activated involuntarily without our awareness.
- **Explicit bias** is a conscious preference or aversion toward a person or group of people, which results from deliberate thoughts that we can identify and communicate with others."

A simple belief can lead to lost opportunities and harm. For example, if an employer assumes men are better at math, women may be denied accounting roles. Implicit bias is especially difficult to recognize because people often act on beliefs that they do not realize they hold. These instinctive reactions have existed throughout human history, rooted in fear of the unfamiliar and passed down as a survival response. While this tendency may be ingrained, it is not natural or acceptable. Recognizing that we can hold illogical beliefs allows us to reflect on and confront how implicit bias continues to shape our behavior today.

To understand how bias impacts your own thinking- you can take the quiz linked on the far right- it is designed for students by a group of researchers at Project Implicit.

Click on the Images for
links and resources



Microaggressions and stereotypes

Workplace discrimination occurs when someone harms others by acting on their implicit or explicit biases based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, ancestry, disability, serious medical condition, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or spousal affiliation. Microaggressions and stereotypes are two kinds of discrimination.

“Microaggressions are verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights that are the results of an individual's implicit bias. They are often automatic or unintentional and occur on a daily basis. Microaggressions communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative viewpoints....

A stereotype is a widely held but oversimplified belief about a particular type of person or group. It happens when someone groups individuals together based on some factor and makes a judgment about them without knowing them.

Microaggressions and stereotypes can happen anywhere. This handout from the National Education Association, provides examples of microaggressions



Examples of
Microaggressions



Know your Workplace Rights

A key part of thriving in a workplace is understanding your rights to a discrimination free workplace. Many states have their own laws, and all states must also follow federal laws. While many laws have existed for a long time, they can be changed and revised over time. The laws discussed below were current as of September 2025 but it is important to check state and federal websites to see if they have changed.

Since 1969, New Mexico's Human Rights Act has protected people from discrimination in areas such as employment, housing, credit, and public services.

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy), age, ancestry, disability, medical condition, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or spousal affiliation. If someone experiences discrimination, they can file a complaint with the New Mexico Human Rights Bureau, which investigates and works toward resolving the issue. The state also has additional laws that safeguard the rights of young workers.

Federal laws protect employees and job applicants from discrimination in the workplace. These laws prohibit unfair treatment based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, related conditions, transgender status, and sexual orientation), national origin, age, disability, or genetic information. They apply to all areas of employment such as hiring, firing, promotions, pay, training, and benefits. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is the federal agency responsible for enforcing these protections and provides videos and fact sheets to help youth understand their workplace rights.



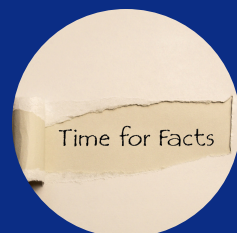
U.S. Equal
Employment
Opportunity



Youth @ Work
Video - Shorter
video



Youth @ Work
Video - Longer
video



Youth @ Work Fact
Sheets

What to Do if Your Rights Are Violated

Experiencing discrimination at work can be upsetting, especially if you are new to a job or still learning your role. It is important to remember that you have the choice about how, when, and to whom you respond. The organization Learning for Justice provides helpful guidance for handling these situations calmly and effectively at school. Since schools are one kind of workplace, they are also useful for thinking about how to speak up at a new job.



Speak Up at School
Guidebook



How to Implement
Speak Up at School



Click here to read the full Speak Up at School guidebook.

Click here to watch a video and create your own pocket guide for speaking up.

Filing a State or Federal Discrimination Report

You also can make the choice to file a formal discrimination report with the state or federal government. In New Mexico, you can file discrimination complaints with the Human Rights Bureau by calling **(800) 566-9471** (toll-free) or **(505) 827-6838** or filling out the form linked below.

You can also choose to file a federal complaint with the EEOC. Directions and guidance for this process can be found at the second link below.

Speaking up against discrimination calmly, thoughtfully, and safely can create ripples of change in your workplace and beyond.



NM Equal Opportunity
Complaint Form



US Equal Opportunity
Complaint Form

Click on the Images for resources



Section 4: Your Career Toolkit

Preparing for your future means more than just building a resume; it's about using your identity, cultural capital, and rights to grow personally and professionally. This section offers tools to help you apply what you've learned about identity, cultural capital, and your rights into your internship and job search, creating a powerful resume and cover letter, and preparation for an interview.

Key Topics:

- Finding internships and jobs
- Creating your resume and cover letter
- Preparing for an interview

The power of internships

Internships are paid or unpaid professional opportunities that allow you to gain work experience in a field you are interested in and learn new skills. Paid internships follow a similar process as applying for any job, but they are also designed to help you learn and grow professionally. For unpaid internships, be clear about the kind of work you want to do and how much time you are willing to volunteer. Even without pay, internships offer valuable experience, help you build your professional network, and allow you to develop new skills.

Where to Find Internships and Jobs?

While some organizations advertise internships or entry-level jobs, many opportunities are created when a motivated young person reaches out. Here are some guidelines to help you become that person.

1. **Identify your professional goals:** Here are some questions to ask yourself.

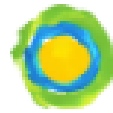
- What do I want to gain from this experience (new skills, career connections, or the chance to make a positive impact)?
- How much time can I commit each week and throughout the year?
- Which of the companies, organizations or agencies do I already have access to via my cultural capital? Maybe there is a community organization your family is involved in, a government agency a parent works at, or a former teacher needing help at the local preschool. Talk to people you know and ask them how to find a internship or job.
- Contact the college and career counselor at your school to learn about local opportunities. Oftentimes local employers send opportunities to school counselors.
- Location: In rural areas like Cuba there are often fewer employers, in addition to looking at local opportunities, consider looking for jobs you can do remotely.

2. Start Searching. A quick search online will bring you to many job sites. We suggest starting with some of the the more specialized search engines below to find your first professional opportunity.

GenerationHired
lists internships and jobs
for for new graduates and
diverse candidates.



Idealist
specializes in jobs
at nonprofit organizations



The **State of New Mexico**
lists open jobs



USAJobs lists
open government jobs

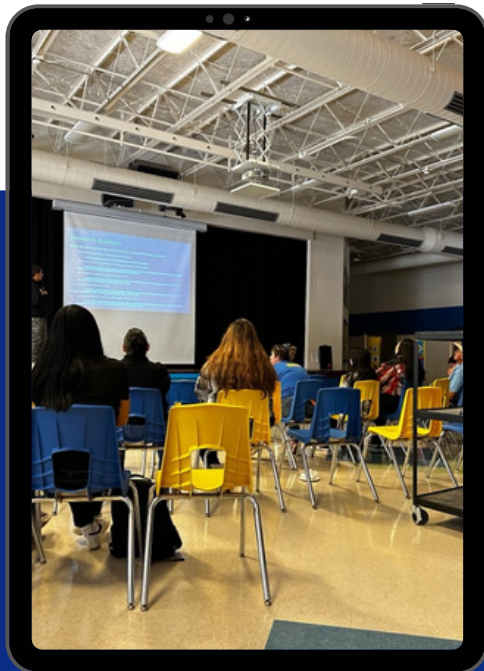


Way Up and No Experience Jobs
specializes in entry level jobs (if you are new to a field or to working)



CoolWorks lists jobs
in the outdoors

You can also try these **large job sites** too:



3. Apply. Once you identify an opportunity you are interested in--apply. Many employers will ask for a resume, cover letter, and references (we will explain that next). Other employers will have you sign into an online portal and fill out information.

4. Highlight your experience, strengths and connections. This is the opportunity to show off your strong identity and cultural capital alongside your education and experiences.

5. Don't give up. If the first few places say no, keep trying! There's always another opportunity waiting. Stay positive and believe in yourself!

Creating a Resume

A resume is a single page that quickly introduces your relevant experience—education, jobs and community service—to future employers. Because a resume lists all of this information in one place, you can easily copy and paste from it for your college application or for the online applications many employers ask you to fill out.

Watch this video to learn how all your high school experiences—from sports, your capstone project, taking care of siblings and volunteering in your community—can be used to demonstrate your relevant experience.



A resume is an excellent place to highlight your identity and cultural capital. To learn how a resume looks, go to pages 6 and 7 of this career guidebook to your right from the American Indian College Fund.

The Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement also offers tips on what NOT to do on a resume. Click on the icon to your right.



Creating a Cover Letter

A cover letter is your opportunity to introduce yourself to your future employer and explain why you are an excellent fit for their open position. Writing a cover letter for the first time can feel overwhelming—so we suggest you watch this video to learn cover letter basics from the Harvard Business Review



This guide shares a little bit more about the cover letter steps introduced in the video



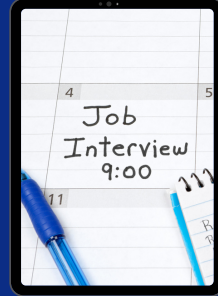
Like your resume, a cover letter shows how your identity makes you unique and qualified. See pages 8–9 of the American Indian College Fund guide to learn more.

Preparing for an Interview

This short video provides key interview tips:



The best way to prepare for an interview is to practice! Ask your school's career counselor or a teacher to do a mock interview with you, or find a friend and have them ask you these questions



It is also important to dress for success. Every workplace has its own dress code, usually explained in the employee handbook. It's helpful to ask your coworkers or supervisor what's appropriate for daily wear. Different jobs have different expectations—law firms might require business attire, while construction sites call for sturdy work clothes and safety gear. These guides also offer tips:



Good luck with your interview! Remember, it's not just about answering questions, it's about showing who you are and what you bring. Be confident in your skills, your experiences, and your story. Your culture is your strength; let it shine through in how you speak, carry yourself, and share your values. When you stay true to your roots, you're not just preparing for a job; you're paving the way for others to see that success can look and sound like you. You've got this!



Conclusion & Additional Resources

Remember that your culture, language, and values are not separate from your professional journey. They are the foundation of it. Entering the workplace does not mean leaving parts of yourself behind. It means bringing your full identity forward with confidence, integrity, and pride.

This guide has offered tools to help you recognize bias, understand your rights, and navigate challenges with dignity. It has also encouraged you to see your cultural background as a strength, a source of creativity, resilience, and community connection.

Below we provide some additional resources- practical tools and organizations that can continue supporting you as you grow personally and professionally. Use them to keep learning, building relationships, and creating spaces where culture and career can thrive together.

Click on the Images below for links and resources



Native Career Pathways



Native College Guidebook



Tribal Colleges Exploration Guide



Native Professional Development



Interacting with faculty in a good way



Students' Awareness of Filipino Culture



[The Foundation for Hispanic Education Innovation & Transformation](#)



Latinx - Career Resources



Black - African American Career Resources



Common Cultural Barriers to Interviews



International Student College Resource



Resource Guide for 1st Gen Latinx Undergraduates

Aheheé, Salamat, Gracias, Dhanyavaadalu, Thank you!

Reference List

The list below includes all of the resources linked throughout the report plus more. If the original link no longer works, try searching the name of the resource.

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