

# Making Culture a Verb

Jimmy Casas' *Culturize* can help leaders create a caring, safe, and effective school environment

By Doreen McSain

What does it take for a leader to “culturize” a school to a level that defines excellence? What would you see if you were to pause, step back, and view your school culture through the eyes of every child, every day? Jimmy Casas opens the first chapter of his book *Culturize* with those questions and others as he challenges school leaders to ensure that the organization they lead supports every student, every day.

The Every Student Succeeds Act regulations in place urge states to include school climate and safety as an indicator in their accountability systems. Federal guidance documents dictate that a comprehensive approach be taken to assess the overall quality of the school environment.

Given those facts, there's no better time for school leaders to read

Casas' book, which takes the topic of school culture and turns it into an action verb. Each chapter of the book includes specific steps leaders can take to make teachers, students, and community members feel cared for, welcome, and safe.

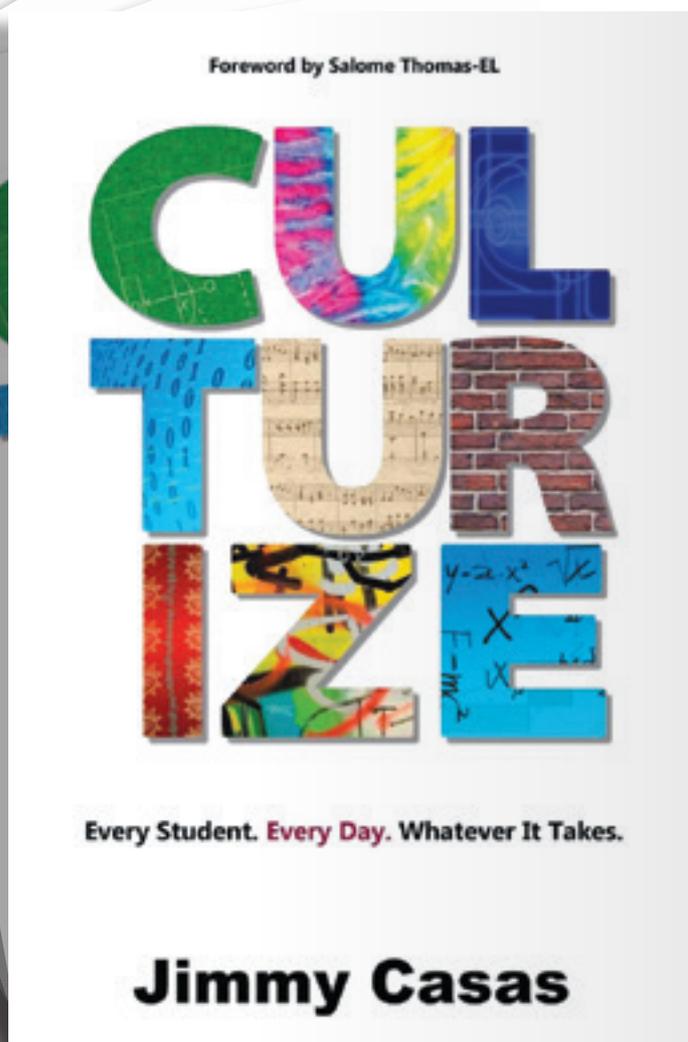
## Culturizing in Context

In the first chapter, Casas defines what it means to culturize a school, setting the stage for the work school leaders must do. To culturize is to “cultivate a community of learners by behaving in a kind, caring, honest, and compassionate manner in order to challenge and inspire each member of the school community to become more than they ever thought possible,” he writes.

Once the context is set and the process defined, Casas introduces the reader to what he feels are the four core principles of positive school culture:

1. Every staff member must be willing to champion for all students.
2. All staff must expect excellence of one another, and most importantly, of their students.
3. All staff members must carry the banner for their school in a positive light at all times.
4. Every educator, administrator, and support staff member must strive to be a “merchant of hope.”

Casas reminds us to never underestimate the value of listening to students in order to understand what they see, feel, and experience. He stresses the importance of spending time building relationships, and he explains that the four core principles can be achieved only if there



is a high level of trust and mutual respect among all parties.

In the second chapter, Casas digs deeper into his first core principle and speaks to the importance of being intentional about doing whatever it takes to help each and every student achieve their personal best. Casas reminds us that even though cheering our students on is critical, support must be coupled with a knowledge of students' strengths and abilities and a dedicated effort to showing them how they can use those skills to thrive.

### Failure Is an Option

Chapter 3 provides insights about capacity building and the leader's task: building confidence in others and setting an example of excellence. Casas says we must give students opportunities to experience failure, because only through failure can we learn how to recover from it. He also writes about the fortitude—the internal strength—that's necessary for leaders to handle the pushback, the toll that making hard decisions can take, and the sheer number of emotional responses that have to be dealt with daily.

Chapters 4 and 5 remind principals and educators how important it is to treat our positions with a sense of honor. "Your vibe attracts your tribe," Casas says, so we must model what we expect from others and let them see how proud we are of our work. When we carry a banner for our schools and act as merchants of hope, we help others see the importance in that work.

Casas ends his reference tool and reflection guide with a reminder that inspiration is all about how we treat people—every day and every person. And if we truly want to inspire a community of learners to "become more than they ever thought possible," we must *show* them. The model we set is the most important tool we have, and we can't be reminded of that often enough. 

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