

Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Diverse, inclusive and safe workplaces

2026—2030



Acknowledgment of Country

The department proudly acknowledges Victoria's First Nations communities as the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands, waters and skies, and pays respect to all Elders past and present.

We recognise First Nations people as Victoria's first educators, artists and scientists, and we value the ongoing contribution of First Nations people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us all.

We also commit to work together to deliver the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination, Truth and Treaty.

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Message from Executive Board

We have a responsibility and a deep commitment to create workplaces that are safe, respectful and inclusive of every employee, every day.

As one of Victoria's largest employers, with over 90,000 employees across schools, early childhood, and corporate areas, our department plays a critical role in shaping a fairer, safer and more prosperous state. We know that diverse and inclusive workplaces foster innovation, boost wellbeing and engagement, and strengthen performance. They also help attract and retain talented people.

To be the best employer we can be, we must foster a culture where diversity is valued, inclusion is practiced, and every member of our workforce is supported to thrive.

The Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2026–2030 brings our aspirations into focus and outlines a clear path forward. It is an opportunity to unite our efforts across the department and to accelerate progress in addressing inequality, inequity and harm.

Our vision is clear: to deliver great education for every child and young person. As part of this, every child, student and young person should also be able to see themselves in their educators and leaders.

Making this vision a reality relies on more than good intentions. It demands systems and practices that are flexible, responsive and that support all employees equitably. It requires designing for diversity and inclusion from the start and not as an afterthought. It means identifying and addressing the barriers in our workplaces, and building the tools, policies and support systems that allow all employees to succeed.

Everyone has a role to play and this work must reach every level of our organisation: in how we lead, how we plan, and how we show up for each other.

With this Strategy, we are laying the foundations for a stronger, more inclusive workplace that will have a lasting impact on our employees, and our school and early childhood communities.

We are excited for the opportunities for impact ahead and the steps we are taking towards equal opportunity and inclusion for all.

The Executive Board

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About the Strategy

The Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2026–2030 outlines our approach to creating a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace. It aims to foster a culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is empowered to contribute their best.

Embracing diversity means appreciating and valuing the different perspectives, backgrounds and experiences each person brings.

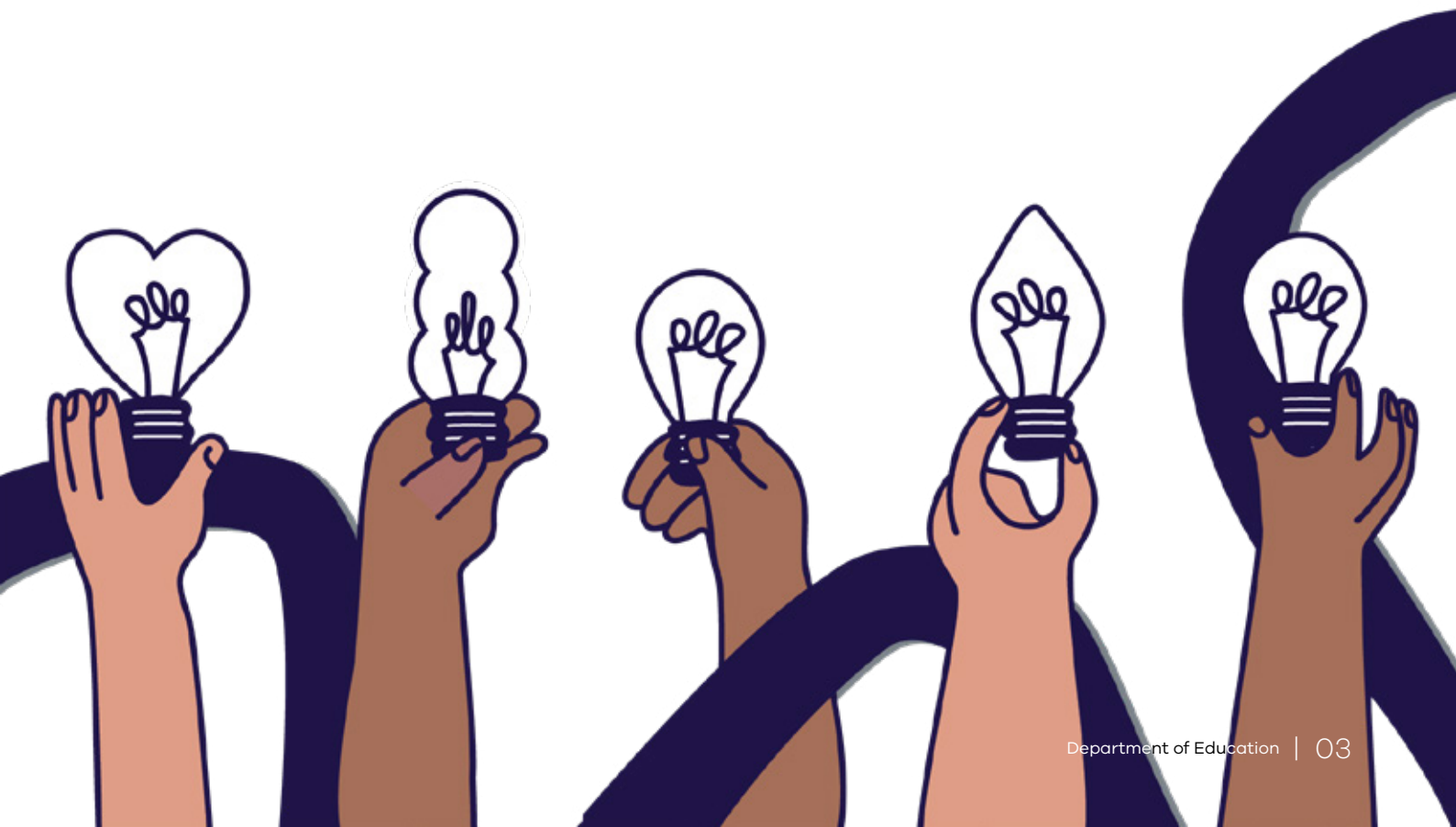
Equity recognises that we don't all start from the same place but we seek to address and balance those differences.

Inclusion ensures that every individual feels respected and valued.

This Strategy, which is an action of the department's Strategic Plan 2025–2029, is our commitment to workforce equity, diversity and inclusion in our schools, early childhood, and corporate and regional workforces.

It is aligned with other key plans including the Aboriginal Employment Plan 2025–2029 and whole-of-sector workforce strategies. The Strategy includes our actions under the department's Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–2029.

The Strategy can be adopted by the department's portfolio entities including the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Victorian Institute of Teaching, Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority and Merit Protection Boards.



How we developed the Strategy

The Strategy was developed collaboratively by analysing current and lapsed action plans. It also involved broad consultation with key internal and external stakeholders to understand what worked well and where further progress is needed.

Consultation activities included:

- reviewing previous strategies, survey data, reports and staff network feedback
- circulating a draft of the Strategy for feedback and refinement
- hosting virtual feedback sessions with staff networks and internal stakeholders in July and August 2025.

Through these consultations, we ensured that the Strategy aligns with broader Victorian Public Service workforce strategies, while also addressing the unique needs of our department.

Staff networks also played an important role in shaping the Strategy as part of our continued commitment to listen and respect the needs of employees.

This inclusive approach helped capture a wide range of perspectives and gain better understanding of the lived experiences of employees.

We thank all employees and stakeholders who contributed their time, expertise and insights. Your feedback has been invaluable in shaping a Strategy that is grounded in lived experience, aligned with workforce priorities, and focused on meaningful, lasting change.



Our diversity profile

Demographic	Schools ¹	Corporate ²
First Nations people	1%	2%
People with disability	5%	9%
Culturally and linguistically diverse people	17%	19%
Culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) ³ people	8%	14%
LGBTIQA+ people	2% Gay or lesbian 2% Bisexual 2% Asexual >1% Pansexual >1% Use a different term >1% Don't know 12% Prefer not to say	4% Gay or lesbian 4% Bisexual 2% Asexual 1% Pansexual 1% Use a different term 1% Don't know 18% Prefer not to say
Gender composition	67% Women 19% Men 0.4% Non-binary or self-described 5% Prefer not to say	64% Women 26% Men 1% Non-binary or self-described 10% Prefer not to say
Women in senior leadership	56% Women	60% Women

* Early Learning Victoria employee data not available at time of publishing as the centres are newly established.

1. Source: Respondents to the School Staff Survey 2025.

2. Source: Respondents to the People Matter Survey 2025.

3. CARM refers to people who cannot be racialised as white and may face barriers because of their race or culture. This term is used instead of cultural diversity or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) as it more directly addresses racism and the barriers experienced by non-white people. ('Chapter 4: Gender and Culturally and Racially Marginalised Employees' and hyperlink to <https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/intersectionality-work/chapter-4-gender-and-culturally-and-racially-marginalised-employees>)

Workforce diversity targets

The Victorian Government has outlined employment targets for all Victorian Government departments to work towards achieving equity, diversity and inclusion in the public sector. These targets are featured in the Department of Education Annual Reports. Where no whole-of-government target exists, the department may develop internal diversity targets.

“Equity sometimes means giving people who used to be left out access first – and that’s okay.”⁴

50%
women

Gender profile at executive and senior leadership

12%

Disability employment

2%

First Nations employment

Priority employee groups

An inclusive workplace culture benefits everyone and we expect the positive impacts of this strategy to be felt by all employees. However, we acknowledge that we do not all start from the same place or experience the same challenges and barriers.

Our 5 priority employee groups represent communities that experience additional barriers to access and inclusion in the workplace and are most affected by systemic barriers.

- **Women and gender diverse people** continue to face barriers such as the gender pay gap, underrepresentation in leadership, and disproportionate caring responsibilities.
- **First Nations people** remain underrepresented and experience the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism and systemic exclusion.
- **LGBTIQA+ people** face stigma, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteristics.
- **People with disability** experience barriers to recruitment, participation and career progression due to inaccessible systems, environments and practices.
- **CARM people** face systemic racism, unconscious bias and exclusion from leadership opportunities.

Focusing on these priority groups the department can better attract and retain diverse talent, enhance employee engagement, and build public trust through demonstrating fairness and equity in practice.

While we specifically highlight these groups to focus our efforts, we recognise all employees and their intersecting identities, including, but not limited to, age and life stage, religious belief, veteran status, and caring responsibilities.

4. All quotes are paraphrased from staff consultation sessions.

Our staff networks

The department's staff networks are integral to promoting diversity, inclusion and a positive workplace culture. Our staff networks are supported by executive champions who raise awareness, provide visible allyship, sponsorship and commitment to inclusion and diversity.



African Australian Network

The network fosters safe and inclusive workplaces where employees of African descent feel valued, respected, and empowered to perform their best. We embrace diverse perspectives and strengthen employee purpose, wellbeing, belonging, and performance across the department.



Enablers Network

The network champions accessibility, inclusion, and support for employees with diverse abilities, ensuring everyone can fully participate and contribute. Fostering understanding, removing barriers, and promoting inclusive practices, strengthens our department and benefits the Victorian community.



Koorie Staff Network

The network champions self-determination and cultural empowerment by creating safe spaces, supporting career growth, and embedding First Nations voices in decision-making. Through genuine partnerships, we strengthen community connections and drive sustainable, respectful, and empowering outcomes for employees and students alike.



PriDE Network

The network works to ensure LGBTIQ+ employees feel safe, valued, and able to thrive by driving allyship, systemic change, and inclusive policies. With an intersectional focus, we create spaces for all LGBTIQ+ people to bring their whole selves to work, reach their potential, and contribute fully to education in Victoria.



Women of Colour Network

The network helps ensure that the unique voices, strengths, and experiences of women of colour, are visible, understood, and valued. We drive systemic change by addressing barriers and championing intersectionality so women of colour, and other underrepresented groups, can thrive.

Goal 1: Foster inclusive and equitable workplaces

We will create safe, accessible and respectful workplaces that value lived experience and embrace diversity.

We strive to be a workplace that understands, supports, respects and celebrates employees' identities, characteristics and unique needs. Fostering an inclusive workplace culture ensures that every individual feels safe, seen and valued for who they are.

It also means preventing and responding to negative behaviours, such as sexual harassment. We need to be responsive in a culturally safe way when employees do not feel safe, take concerns seriously and act to create a safer environment. Employees who feel they belong and are connected to the workplace are empowered to build meaningful careers and contribute their great talent to the Victorian community.

"Diversity and inclusion is not just a compliance exercise, it is at the core of our values, and when done right, helps everyone do their jobs better."

Focus areas

- 1.1. Continuous improvement of policies, procedures and practices to ensure they are inclusive and culturally safe.
- 1.2. Enhance accessibility and inclusion across all workplaces, including support for hidden disabilities and cultural needs.
- 1.3. Draw on the lived experiences of employees to identify and address systemic barriers and strengthen psychological and cultural safety.
- 1.4. Strengthen safe systems of work, including the prevention and response to sexual harassment, through ongoing strategies and initiatives.
- 1.5. Promote awareness and increase participation in observance of significant events and training opportunities.

What success looks like

- Workplaces are grounded in cultural safety, equity and respect, with a proactive commitment to creating environments free from discrimination, sexual harassment, racism and bullying.
- Workplace adjustments and flexible work arrangements are timely, culturally responsive, and tailored to individual needs.
- Employees feel safe and supported to share aspects of their identity and lived experience, without fear of discrimination.



Goal 2: Attract, develop and retain a diverse workforce

We will grow a workforce that reflects Victoria's diversity and provides fair and inclusive opportunities for career development.

A diverse and representative workforce enriches learning experiences for children, students and young people through role-modelling, understanding of lived experiences, and inclusive practices. It's a crucial component of a high-quality education system that prepares students not only academically, but also socially and emotionally, to be global citizens in a connected world.

A diverse and representative workforce also signals to current and future employees that everyone has a fair chance to succeed, regardless of their background or identity. When leadership and decision-making spaces reflect the diversity of the broader community, we are better placed to understand and meet the needs of all Victorians.

"Inclusion should be built in, not added on at the last minute."

Focus areas

- 2.1. Continuous improvement of recruitment, onboarding practices, and internal career pathways to ensure they are inclusive, culturally safe and accessible.
- 2.2. Integrate diversity and inclusion into workforce planning, including the use of targeted recruitment, special measures and identified roles where appropriate.
- 2.3. Strengthening pathways and opportunities to attract and recruit diverse applicants through targeted programs, resources and promotion.
- 2.4. Support the growth and participation of employees from the 5 priority employee groups in career development and leadership programs.

What success looks like

- Achieving and maintaining a workforce composition that reflects the diversity of the Victorian community at all levels.
- Employees experience a culturally safe and inclusive recruitment and onboarding process at the department.
- Employment policies and practices are equitable, transparent and culturally responsive.
- Employees from the 5 priority groups have equitable access to professional and career growth opportunities.



Goal 3: Build inclusive leadership capability

We will equip leaders with the skills, confidence and accountability to champion diversity and inclusion and act against discrimination and exclusion.

Inclusive leadership involves creating an environment where everyone feels respected, heard, and empowered to contribute their ideas. When leaders are diverse and inclusive, they cultivate trust, collaboration and psychological safety which enables everyone to thrive at work.

Leaders need to be aware of their power and privilege and actively address inequities in the workplace. This requires empathy, cultural humility, and a commitment to learning.

Through this goal, the department is committed to embedding inclusion in leadership performance and equipping leaders with the tools and confidence to succeed. By strengthening inclusive leadership across the department, we are investing in a stronger, fairer and more future-ready public service.

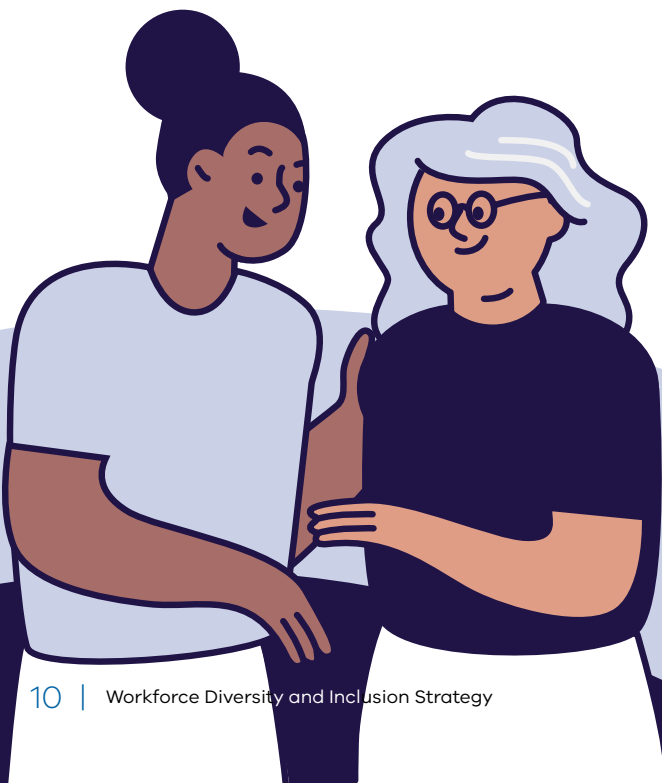
“Having diverse people in your team is great, but true inclusion requires rethinking how we do things.”

Focus areas

- 3.1. Embed diversity and inclusion expectations and accountability measures for executives, people leaders and principals.
- 3.2. Strengthen leadership capability to model inclusive behaviours and create safe, respectful and culturally responsive workplaces through tailored training, resources and ongoing engagement.
- 3.3. Support leaders to address negative behaviours and respond to reports in a timely and appropriate way.
- 3.4. Use existing people leader training and guidance to help leaders actively contribute to workforce diversity and inclusion goals.

What success looks like

- Leaders demonstrate inclusive behaviours and embed inclusion in everyday decision-making and team culture.
- Leaders are confident in identifying and addressing bias, microaggressions, and systemic barriers, and are capable in taking proactive steps to minimise negative behaviours.
- Inclusion and cultural capability are embedded into leadership performance expectations and reviews.
- Leaders can address requests for workplace adjustments with confidence.
- Leaders know how to contribute to workforce diversity targets and recruitment initiatives.
- Employees feel confident that reporting negative behaviours will make a positive difference.



Goal 4: Strengthen diversity data collection, analysis and use

We will use intersectional data to inform policy, measure progress, and drive equitable workforce outcomes.

Intersectional employee diversity data is essential for:

- understanding our workforces
- designing policies and practices that are fair, inclusive and responsive
- measuring progress against diversity targets and holding ourselves accountable.

Collecting and analysing this data will ensure that the department's efforts to improve diversity and inclusion are guided by evidence. To do this we must ensure that the right systems are in place to support data collection and measurement.

This goal also contributes to creating a safe environment where employees understand why data is gathered, how it will be protected, and how it will be used to create positive change.

Focus areas

- 4.1. Build trust, transparency and accountability to encourage employees to share diversity information through self-identification.
- 4.2. Report on diversity trends, gaps and opportunities by collecting and analysing intersectional workforce data (including workforce representation, pay equity and career progression).
- 4.3. Continuously review diversity data collection, identifying gaps, and enhancing what is collected and measured.

What success looks like

- Employees trust that their diversity information is collected and used safely, respectfully, and with a clear purpose.
- Departmental systems support regular and safe collection of useful employee data to inform strategies, inclusive workforce planning, and decision-making.
- Leaders access intersectional workforce data to inform workforce strategies and action plans.

"Diversity and inclusion can't rely on luck and goodwill – it requires consistent and deliberate action."



Measuring success

We will use the Gender Equality Audit, People Matter Survey, School Staff Survey and other metrics to track and report on progress against the Strategy. The main areas we will measure and monitor include:



Workforce composition and progression

Representation across the workforce, recruitment outcomes, and career progression rates, including across the 5 priority employee groups.



Employee engagement and experience

Employees' sense of belonging, cultural safety and ability to be themselves at work.



Leadership engagement and participation

Leadership attendance at training sessions, inclusion of diversity and inclusion goals in performance measures, and leader confidence to embed diversity and inclusion.



Safe and respectful culture

Employees' sense of psychological safety to report bullying, harassment and discrimination. Their ability to recognise bias, stereotypes, exclusion and inappropriate behaviour. To have the confidence to take effective bystander action.



Benchmarking

Independent surveys and industry comparisons to track diversity and inclusion performance over time.

Monitoring

The Strategy is delivered through implementation plans.

Progress against the Strategy's goals will be reported to the department's Culture, People and Integrity Committee and Executive Board.

Updates will be shared with staff networks and published on departmental employee channels.

People and Executive Services coordinates implementation, monitoring and reporting activities under the Strategy.

To learn more about the Strategy or to provide input, contact diversity@education.vic.gov.au.

"Change starts when we lean into discomfort and really listen to lived experiences."

Key definitions

Diversity

Diversity is about the unique blend of characteristics that make each of us who we are. It includes visible traits such as age, ethnicity, gender, and physical or intellectual ability, as well as less visible aspects like cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity, education, faith, family responsibilities, socioeconomic background, and ways of thinking or working.

When we embrace diversity, we tap into a broader range of perspectives, skills and experiences that strengthen our teams and decisions.

Inclusion

Inclusion is about action. It's reflected in our everyday behaviours, our culture, and the systems we build. An inclusive environment actively values and respects individuals, creating a sense of belonging where people feel safe to bring their authentic selves to work.

When people feel seen, heard and valued, they thrive and so does the organisation.

Equality and equity

Equality means everyone has the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities, no matter their background or circumstances. However, we know that opportunities are not equally distributed in society, and treating everyone exactly the same can lead to unequal results.

Equity means giving people what they need to have an equal chance, which may look different for different people. Achieving equity can involve making adjustments, removing barriers, and taking specific action to address imbalances.

This includes:

- removing barriers in physical, technological and cultural environments
- making sure places, practices and programs are accessible
- directing resources and budgets towards equitable outcomes for all.

Gender diverse

Gender diverse is an umbrella term used for a range of different genders. In this Strategy, it includes anyone who identified as transgender, non-binary or self-described their gender in their employee experience survey.

Cultural safety

Cultural safety means creating spaces where people feel respected, understood and safe to express who they are, without fear of judgement, challenge or denial of their identity.

It's about shared respect, shared meaning and shared experiences. Culturally safe environments acknowledge lived experience and foster the trust required to learn, grow and work together meaningfully.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognises that people's identities are multifaceted and that these overlapping aspects, such as race, gender, class, sexuality or disability, can combine to produce unique forms of disadvantage or privilege.

Understanding intersectionality helps us see the bigger picture. It enables us to address inequality in more meaningful ways and to create policies and practices that reflect the real lives of the people we serve and work with.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional, verbal, behavioural or environmental displays of prejudice or discrimination. They can be directed to individuals based on their identity, such as race, gender, disability, cultural background or sexual orientation.

These behaviours reflect broader systems of inequality. Instead, addressing microaggressions can increase feelings of cultural safety, improve wellbeing and help marginalised groups feel less isolated at work.

Culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) people

CARM refers to people who cannot be racialised as white, including Black, Brown, Asian, and other non-white groups who may face marginalisation because of their race or culture. This term is used instead of cultural diversity or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) as it more directly addresses racism and the barriers experienced by non-white people. Oloria nustiorunt eatibuscil expe nonecus inciam, to beati odis reptat vitatesciure porpor millo et optaspiciate magnisti dolorum con reptat.

