



The Importance of Addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Schools: Dispelling Myths About Critical Race Theory

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is committed to supporting ongoing dialogue and self-reflection about antiracism, equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice within the organization and the profession of school psychology (NASP, 2020c). This includes promoting honest conversations in schools. Schools have long explored the role of race and racism in our country’s history, including disparities in opportunity and education. It is important that we provide students with an honest and accurate assessment of history so that they can create a better future. The growing politicization of these issues has manifested in the demonization and purposeful misrepresentation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and other well-established policies and practices in schools, such as social-emotional instruction and the implementation of culturally responsive practices. These discussions are happening at local school board meetings, in communities, in state legislatures, and in Congress. Students are paying attention, and the divisive rhetoric and intentional misrepresentation of CRT is causing confusion and disruption and could undermine a positive school climate when students return in the fall.

The NASP position statement entitled “Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism” states that:

positive educational and social outcomes for all children and youth are possible only in a society—and schools within it—that guarantees equitable treatment to all people, regardless of race, class, culture, language, gender, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, ability, and other dimensions of difference. NASP firmly believes that all students are entitled to an education that affirms and validates the diversity of their cultural and individual differences, fosters resilience, and facilitates well-being and positive academic and mental health outcomes. (NASP, 2019)

Central to this effort is allowing for honest, respectful, and developmentally appropriate discussions about topics such as privilege, racism, bias, and systemic racism in our nation’s schools. These conversations are not meant to divide students, teach them to hate each other, or to make students feel shame about their race, community, or country. Rather, these dialogues foster critical thinking and provide a framework to understand how existing systems, structures, and policies can cause inequitable outcomes. Professional development for teachers and educators on privilege, racism, bias, and systemic racism is essential but not because individual educators or students are consciously racist. Rather, this type of professional development provides them with necessary tools to advance equity in their schools and classrooms, ensure that all students see themselves in the curriculum, and identify and remedy the impact their individual biases may have on their students.

The purpose of this document is to provide a general overview of CRT, dispel myths and correct misinformation, and provide school psychologists with guidance on how to navigate related conversations in local schools and communities. This issue is complex and nuanced, and this document should not be considered a definitive resource on the topic. Additional resources for further reading are included at the end of this document.

WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)?

- CRT is a theoretical framework for examining American society with a belief that racism is embedded in U.S. laws and institutions and not just the result of individual prejudices or biases. Complementing the NASP Social Justice Strategic Goal, CRT seeks to understand inequities that exist based on race.
- CRT is a collection of ideas rather than a single doctrine, and many scholars have contributed to the body of CRT work. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Derrick Bell are often considered the founders of modern CRT.
- CRT is most frequently applied at the higher education and policy levels to understand how racism may or may not be shaping structures and systems in the country, and, ideally, inform necessary changes to improve their function for all people.
- CRT recognizes that race is a social construct and race does not reflect biological differences among people (e.g., differences in intelligence, physical ability).
- CRT includes an understanding that systemic racism is part of American history and still exists in modern society.
- CRT identifies and examines the ways in which White supremacy and racism permeate systems today, including the continuation of generational poverty; barriers in accessing housing, education, and healthcare; and funding and economic development approaches that privilege predominantly White neighborhoods and disadvantage marginalized and minoritized communities.
- CRT is a framework to examine the inequities in existing structures, policies, and laws in order to rebuild them equitably.
- CRT focuses on examining and remedying disparate outcomes rather than changing individuals' beliefs.

CORRECTIONS TO MISINFORMATION ABOUT CRT

- CRT does not imply that one race is superior or inferior to another.
- CRT does not posit that all White individuals are racist and all racially minoritized individuals are oppressed.
- CRT is not a way to enact racism and discrimination against White individuals.
- Though related, CRT is not synonymous with cultural responsiveness, culturally relevant teaching, or equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives.
- CRT is not the same as social–emotional learning (SEL).
- CRT is not an attempt to make people feel bad about their race.
- CRT is not a tool to divide students or school staff and teach them to hate others.
- CRT does not promote or condone a specific political ideology (e.g., socialism, Marxism, anticapitalism).
- CRT is not a means of judging another person based on race or making assumptions based on race.
- CRT is not the same as teaching the good and bad parts of U.S. history.
- CRT is not [The 1619 Project](#), which is a Pulitzer Prize winning long-form journalism project.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CRT AND RELATED TOPICS

CRT, social justice, systemic racism, bias, and other similar topics can lead to heated debate and, at times, divide a community as we are seeing in some school districts around the country. “Critical Race Theory” has become the catch-all term in the media, some state legislatures, and school boards to cover any topic related to racial disparity, racism, and cultural responsiveness, and even policies that support the civil rights of LGBTQ+ youth. It is the unfortunate reality that these topics have also become overtly political, resulting in the dissemination of purposeful misinformation.

Many stakeholders, including families, educators, and legislators, may be unfamiliar with or have inaccurate information about CRT, often creating strong reactions without a full understanding of CRT. In addition, some families may be resistant to these topics being addressed at school because they want to be the ones to introduce their children to these concepts. It will be important for school psychologists to have an understanding of the information being circulated in local communities to help promote an accurate understanding of CRT as well as the relevant and related topics (e.g., equity, cultural responsiveness) that are necessary components of pre-K–12 education.

Legal Bans on Teaching CRT in Schools

It is equally important that school psychologists have a solid understanding of what local school board policy and/or state laws allow or expressly prohibit when it comes to topics related to racism, bias, diversity, and equity. Many states and districts across the country are enacting policies to ban the teaching of CRT (even if the definition is inappropriately applied). According to an analysis by *Education Week*, 25 states have proposed legislation to ban CRT in schools, and eight states have effectively banned CRT and related topics from being discussed in schools via legislation or other avenues (*Education Week*, 2021). Although these policies primarily relate to what can be taught to students, many schools and districts have applied a broad interpretation of “CRT bans” to include any professional development or other activities aimed at helping educators mitigate bias and promote equity in their schools, classrooms, and communities.

Differentiating SEL, Culturally Responsive Practice, and CRT

When engaging in conversations with families and/or other educators, it is important to use the correct terminology that reflects the work occurring in your district. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives are critical to promoting positive outcomes for all students. School psychologists should be knowledgeable about EDI and related work in their schools, and they should be able to articulate its importance to various stakeholders. Because SEL is a framework that also promotes equity, affirms and respects individual differences and identities, acknowledges cultural differences, and supports the examination of individual biases, it is often conflated with CRT. School psychologists should continue to stress the importance of SEL programming to improve academic, mental, and behavioral health and overall life

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a critical element of pre-K–12 education. SEL facilitates healthy identity development and teaches students how to effectively identify and manage their emotions, set and achieve personal and collective goals, solve problems and effectively address interpersonal conflict, develop and demonstrate empathy for others, develop and maintain healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. Incorporating cultural responsiveness into SEL can help make the curricula more meaningful to and effective with all students. SEL is associated with long term improvements in academic achievement and school climate, and it reduces student anxiety, behavior problems, and substance abuse.

outcomes. Further, when discussing the importance of addressing racial equity in schools, it will be helpful to highlight how data demonstrate flaws in the *system* vs. flaws in the student. For example, instead of saying “data indicate that Black students are expelled 3.5 times as often as White students even when committing the same infraction,” say “we need to examine the role of bias and how it affects educators’ interpretation of children’s behavior. This may help explain why Black students are expelled 3.5 times as often as White students, and highlights why we need to educate adults and students about the role of bias and racism in our society.”

Professional Development

NASP actively promotes the inclusion of professional development on topics like critical race theory, diversity, White privilege, mitigating bias, social justice, culturally responsive and antiracist practices within the school context, and other concepts necessary to promote an equitable education system. Although this may be difficult, as school psychologists we must accept that we will not be able to change everyone’s minds. Not everyone will agree that teaching about privilege and racism is necessary to truly dismantle systemic racism and is beneficial for all students. However, we do not have to accept policies that allow disparity to continue. School psychologists can, and should, actively engage in efforts to ensure that school, district, state, and federal policies hold people accountable for ensuring equity in education.

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including all students’ cultural references and backgrounds into the curriculum and learning experience. (Ladson Billings, 1994). It is a strengths-based approach that views students’ cultural differences as skills to build upon rather than deficits to be fixed. This applies to culturally responsive service delivery as well which is important to ensuring that services account for cultural experiences and are being framed and delivered in the most accessible, effective way possible.

School Psychologists’ Role and Ethical Obligations

NASP’s Professional Standards are clear that school psychologists have an ethical and professional responsibility to attend to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in their professional practice, as well as advocate to eliminate systemic racism, inequity, and other discriminatory factors in schools that can harm or marginalize students. School psychologists are in a unique position to:

- lead and support equity teams in school buildings to facilitate open and respectful discussions about race, privilege, racism, systemic racism and bias with staff, students, and families;
- disseminate factual information about CRT and dispel myths;
- work with administrators and educators to ensure robust engagement and communication with families about what is and is not being taught in school;
- help educate families and school communities about the importance of racial equity and culturally responsive teaching and services;
- participate on school and district teams to identify and remedy disparities;
- advocate for needed policy changes at the local, state, and federal levels that advance racial equity and protects educators’ ability to foster critical thinking about racism, bias, and equity in their schools and classrooms.

Key NASP Ethical Standards

Standards 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 of the NASP *Principles for Professional Ethics* (NASP, 2020b, p. 44) state that “School psychologists do not engage in or condone actions or policies that discriminate against

persons, including students and their families, other recipients of service, supervisees, and colleagues based on actual or perceived characteristics” and school psychologists “work to correct school practices that are unjustly discriminatory or that deny students or others their legal rights. School psychologists take steps to foster a school climate that is supportive, inclusive, safe, accepting, and respectful toward all persons, particularly those who have experienced marginalization in educational settings” (p. 44). We have an ethical responsibility to advocate for policy and practice that actively address disparities and promote equity for all students. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, however, examples of such policies include:

- Incorporation of equity, diversity, and inclusion topics for staff and students in public schools. This includes adequate funding and guidance to support these efforts.
- Delivery of comprehensive curricula that are culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and academically engaging for all students.
- Assessment and remediation of disproportionality in special education identification, eligibility for gifted education, access to advanced/AP courses, and academic outcomes, including high school completion rates and student discipline and arrest rates.
- Implementation of accountability systems that promote a culture of constant improvement, disaggregated data collection and reporting, and intentional remedy of any disparities.
- Promotion of supportive and effective discipline policies and practices, as outlined in the *Framework for Effective School Discipline* (NASP, 2020a), including state and federal incentives to implement such programs.
- Elimination of zero tolerance discipline policies and limiting of exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately impact students from minoritized backgrounds.
- Systematic assessment of institutional climate within schools, ensuring that bias and its potential consequences are understood, and that people of traditionally underrepresented backgrounds feel welcome, respected, and are met with high expectations.

More information, research, and specific talking points about these issues are available on the NASP website.

RESOURCES

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Contributors: Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, Sheila Desai, and Katherine Cowan

Reviewers: Charles Barrett, Celeste Malone, Angela Mann, Leandra Parris, and Sherrie Proctor,

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