

Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is committed to advocating for the rights of all students to be educated in safe schools and communities free from prejudice and discrimination. NASP is committed to ensuring that all children receive high-quality, equitable opportunities to learn in educational environments where their rights are protected consistent with NASP’s professional guidelines and federal legislation (e.g., Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). 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.

DEFINITIONS

- *Prejudice* refers to irrational or unjustifiable negative emotions or evaluations toward persons from other social groups, and it is a primary determinant of discriminatory behavior (Friske, Gilbert, & Gardner, 2010).
- *Discrimination* refers to inappropriate treatment of people because of their actual or perceived group membership and may include both overt and covert behaviors, including microaggressions, or indirect or subtle behaviors (e.g., comments) that reflect negative attitudes or beliefs about a nonmajority group.
- *Racism* refers to prejudice or discrimination against individuals or groups based on beliefs about one’s own racial superiority or the belief that race reflects inherent differences in attributes and capabilities. Racism is the basis for social stratification and differential treatment that advantage the dominant group. It can take many forms, including explicit racial prejudice and discrimination by individuals and institutions (e.g., Jim Crow laws after the Reconstruction) as well as structural or environmental racism in policies or practices that foster discrimination and mutually reinforcing social inequalities (e.g., attendance policies that favor a majority group). Racism can also take the form of unconscious beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes toward racial groups in the form of implicit bias (e.g., assuming limited ability when students speak non-standard English; fearful responses to verbal or physical behavior of non-White students; Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Jackson, 2016). Other forms of racism are modern symbolic racism in which individuals deny the continued existence of racial inequality while contributing to discrimination and aversive racism through in-group favoritism for the dominant racial group (Bailey et al., 2017; Friske et al., 2010).

RATIONALE

Prejudice and discrimination are detrimental to students' development and well-being. In addition, they remain commonplace in the lives of individuals from nonmajority/nondominant racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and religious groups; women; and other minoritized groups (see for examples, Arellano-Morales et al., 2015; Bucchianeri, Gower, McMorris, & Eisenberg, 2016; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Coupled with other common types of prejudice and discrimination against nondominant groups (e.g., classism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and nationalism), the framework of *intersectionality* is used to identify the ways in which various social statuses are experienced simultaneously and may have additive or compounding effects on individuals' outcomes (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality is also helpful for understanding how social statuses or differences interact to influence learning, behavior, and social inequality.

NASP believes that prejudice and discrimination harm all people, but especially children and youth, and our society at large. Prejudice and discrimination are negatively associated with the physical well-being, mental health, and adaptive functioning of individuals from nondominant racial/ethnic groups, religious communities, sexual orientations, cultural groups, immigrants, and other intergroup contexts (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Brown, 2015; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Meyer, 2003; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Paradies et al., 2015; Samari, 2016; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). Discrimination has harmful effects whether experienced directly, online (Tynes et al., 2008), or vicariously (Heard-Garris et al., 2018), and across the lifespan (National Research Council, 2014). In addition, integrated educational settings where nondiscrimination is practiced are associated with positive educational, social, and cognitive outcomes for *all* students—both majority and minoritized group members—as well as long-term educational, economic, and civic outcomes (Kirwan Institute, 2009; Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). This strong research base supports NASP's commitment to mitigating the effects of discrimination in all forms.

Decades of social psychology research indicate that promising approaches to reducing prejudice and discrimination include:

- increasing intergroup contact;
- working to foster greater empathy and perspective-taking when interacting with others;
- engaging in open dialogue about issues of difference in order to increase compassion and dispel stereotypes; and
- reducing the salience of group boundaries by emphasizing commonalities (American Psychological Association, 2012; Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008).

Other school-based approaches to reducing and preventing discrimination include:

- crafting antidiscrimination and antiharassment policies that protect a variety of sociodemographic groups;
- transforming social norms to express the value of a plurality of identities and modes of identity expression;
- promoting cooperative learning to foster intergroup contact;
- establishing written procedures to guide referral of students for special education, providing training to properly implement those procedures, and regularly reviewing school data for instances of discrimination;

- requiring staff to participate in cultural awareness or implicit bias training to better understand how to identify and overcome racial stereotypes;
- and collecting and analyzing school and disaggregated discipline data to act on any identified racial/ethnic and special education disparities while implementing school-wide positive behavior supports (Horn & Romeo, 2010; Lhamon, 2016; Skiba, 2013).

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

School psychologists are committed to fairness and justice for all as they help to preserve the dignity of all individuals in their professional practices and interactions (NASP, 2010a). Developed in consultation with a diverse cadre of school psychologists, including practitioners, faculty, and social justice researchers, and adopted by the NASP Leadership Assembly in September 2017, the following definition operationalizes social justice and informs NASP’s commitment to advancing this central principle of contemporary school psychological practice (NASP, 2017):

Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth.

Relatedly, NASP is committed to supporting the educational and mental health needs of all students, regardless of race, culture, linguistic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, socioeconomic status, nationality, citizenship, disability, educational need, or other dimensions of difference. All school psychologists, regardless of the settings in which they serve, are charged with advocating for culturally responsive, evidence-based practice, and with assisting their colleagues and professional communities with reforming policies and practices that contribute to inequitable outcomes (NASP, 2009). Further, NASP’s standards (NASP, 2010a, Standard I.3.1; 2010b) call for school psychologists to promote fairness and justice by cultivating safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environments. The following recommendations are offered for school psychologists in order to foster social justice and mitigate racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Professional Learning Recommendations

- School psychologists engage in continuous professional learning to ensure their knowledge, skills, and clinical practices reflect understanding and respect for human diversity and promote effective services, advocacy, and equitable outcomes for all children, families, schools, and communities.
- School psychologists actively learn about the different groups represented in their schools and communities-at-large, and they use knowledge of this diversity to facilitate the services provided in and out of school.
- School psychologists engage in critical reflection to identify their own biases and ensure that they do not negatively affect students, families, schools, and communities.
- School psychologists encourage and support their colleagues in necessary critical reflection about the intersection of various dimensions of difference, power, privilege, and discrimination that contribute to disparities.

- School psychologists seek supervision or consultation when dealing with unfamiliar clients or situations, or when facing circumstances that otherwise challenge their multicultural competence or nondiscriminatory practice skills.
- School psychologists seek effective and ongoing professional development and other resources regarding evidence-based practice, cultural responsiveness, advocacy, and self-reflection.

Professional Practice Recommendations

- School psychologists practice in accordance with the principles of social justice, intentionally considering the manner in which students, families, schools, and communities interact with interconnected systems (American Psychological Association, 2017; Miranda, 2014) and how they experience systemic factors such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination that contribute to various inequities.
- School psychologists intervene when they are bystanders to discrimination and harassment directed at students or adults from marginalized backgrounds—and prepare others to do so as well—in order to disrupt and prevent discriminatory behavior in schools.
- School psychologists partner with families, community members, teachers, staff, and, when developmentally appropriate, students to understand more clearly student and population needs.
- School psychologists ensure their practices are grounded in an evidence-based framework (e.g., Indigenous Conceptual Framework; Charley et al., 2015) that integrates: (a) the best available research evidence and (b) a thorough knowledge of how diversity factors may influence child development, behavior, and school learning to engage in culturally responsive practice—even when this requires challenging common practices.
- School psychologists work to establish positive, productive, and collaborative relationships with students, families, and colleagues from all backgrounds.
- School psychologists assist administrators in evaluating current practices, policies, and procedures (e.g., discipline disproportionality through the lens of suspensions and expulsions, referral for special education eligibility) to determine overall effectiveness and any potential disparities in access, participation, or outcomes among students from different groups.
- School psychologists promote systems change and equitable alternatives when ineffective or inequitable policies, practices, or procedures are suspected or identified by school data.

In sum, school psychologists strive to ensure that all children and youth are valued, that their rights and opportunities are protected in schools and communities, and that they have equal opportunity and access to participate in and benefit from school programs, including school psychological services. In their words and actions, school psychologists promote positive school climates that are safe and welcoming to all persons regardless of actual or perceived characteristics, across various dimensions of difference (NASP, 2010a).

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RESOURCES

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National Association of School Psychologists. (2012). *Effective service delivery for Indigenous children and youth* [Position Statement]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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