

## Resolution Committing to Antiracism Action

We are at a historical moment where some in the United States are more openly discussing how racism is endemic to our culture and organizations. The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, in addition to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black communities, have highlighted the systemic inequities that Black people have faced historically and continue to face today. The tragic deaths at the hands of law enforcement have again galvanized a coalition of novice and veteran activists alike around the Black Lives Matter movement. However, the existence of systemic racism is not universally acknowledged, nor accepted, and, as a result, not all are committed to actively confronting racism both on an individual and systemic level. In the wake of continued anti-Blackness and racism toward other communities of color, many individuals and organizations have begun to wrestle in earnest with their roles in perpetuating systemic racism. Schools are a microcosm of both past and current conditions in our society. As a professional association for school-based mental health professionals, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)—and school psychologists as individuals—must examine our own history and take steps to commit to antiracist practices.

### TERMINOLOGY

Before describing the commitments to antiracist actions contained in this document, it is important to be clear on terminology. In particular, clarification on the definitions of *interpersonal racism*, *institutional racism*, and *antiracism* is warranted. The following is adapted from NASP's (2019) position statement on prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

**Racism** is a complex construct often misconstrued by people. For many, 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. However, these conceptualizations merely reflect the symptoms of the deeper issue. According to David Wellman (1977) and as championed by Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017), racism is defined as “a system of advantage based on race ... involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals. In the context of the United States, this system clearly operates to the advantage of Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color” (Tatum, 2017, p. 87).

Racism can occur at many levels, including interpersonal and systemic. **Interpersonal racism** can take many forms, including explicit racial prejudice and discrimination by individuals. For example, a microaggression, such as an individual school psychologist making negative statements about students of color, is an example of interpersonal racism. **Often, the first step in addressing any form of oppression, racial or otherwise, involves examination of one's own biases and ways in which we and other educators may be engaging in oppressive acts. Individual oppressive acts that go unchallenged, as well as collective actions—active or passive—contribute to systemic racism.** Systematic racism occurs when structural or environmental policies and practices foster discrimination and reinforce social inequalities, such as Jim Crow laws or disproportionality in school discipline practices.

**Antiracism** is defined as the ability “to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right—inferior or superior—with any of the racial groups. Whenever the antiracist sees individuals behaving positively or negatively, the antiracist sees exactly that: individuals behaving positively or negatively, not representatives of whole races. To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do” (Kendi, 2019, p. 105).

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AND RACISM**

While NASP has worked hard to promote cultural competence and social justice, we acknowledge and denounce past professional practices that were rooted in racism. For example, school psychologists have long noted a difference in scores between White and Black individuals on a variety of measures commonly used with children and schools, but failed to adjust interpretations or examine the role of systems of oppression in this difference. Decades of the misuse of intelligence tests culminated in the 1979 *Larry P. v. Riles* ruling, which prevented the use of IQ tests in assessment of Black children for special education purposes in California. For many years (and continuing in some cases today), school psychologists overly relied on assessments that utilized dominant group comparisons, thus putting many minoritized students at a disadvantage. Another example is the concept of *drop-out*. School psychology literature and practice often reference “drop-out” as a term to describe when a student quits school before graduating, but many minoritized students are “pushed out” due to school policies that discourage and dishearten these students (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, 2014).

We believe that school psychology has the potential to be very impactful when it comes to antiracism work, yet it is clear that our field has not served minoritized and disenfranchised students properly. For too long, we sought to “serve” those groups by comparing them to groups with greater social/racial/financial privilege and characterizing them from a deficit perspective. The mission was to have them “catch up” in the ways they were different from their normative peers (Martín-Baró, 1994). While NASP advocates for a much broader role for school psychologists as articulated in the NASP Practice Model, our historical role in special education evaluations is problematic. Also problematic is the field’s relative silence—with several notable exceptions—until fairly recently on topics such as racial discrimination in access to educational resources and racial prejudice in school discipline procedures. Additionally, the demographic makeup of school psychology is overwhelmingly White, with only very gradual changes towards a field that more closely represents the demographics of the students in which school psychologists serve. Historically, this lack of representation is also seen in the leadership of NASP.

This resolution is written with this history in mind. While no profession or organization has a perfect record when it comes to combating racism, NASP realizes that we can and must truly be committed to our role as social justice advocates and agents through immediate and long-term action.

**WHEREAS**, advancing social justice is a strategic goal for NASP and an ethical principle for school psychologists who serve on the frontlines of advocacy for ALL children; and

**WHEREAS**, the NASP-adopted definition of social justice for school psychologists includes action to address systemic barriers, such as the long-term issues of poverty, inequity, prejudice, racism, and violence; and

**WHEREAS**, Standard I.3.1 of the NASP *Principles for Professional Ethics* (NASP, 2020b, p. 44) states 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

**WHEREAS**, Standard I.3.2 states 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); and

**WHEREAS**, school psychologists promote healthy school, family, and community environments. They assume a proactive role in identifying social injustices that affect children and youth and schools, and they strive to reform systems-level patterns of injustice; and

**WHEREAS**, NASP is committed to ensuring that all children receive high-quality, equitable opportunities to learn in educational environments in which 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); and

**WHEREAS**, 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); and

**WHEREAS**, prejudice and discrimination are negatively associated with the physical well-being, mental health, and adaptive functioning of individuals from nondominant racial and 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; Paradies et al., 2015; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Samari, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2014); and

**WHEREAS**, police brutality can lead to physiological responses that increase morbidity and psychological stress for many communities of color (Alang et al., 2017); and

**WHEREAS**, BIPOC<sup>1</sup> communities have less access to mental and behavioral health care as compared to White communities (McGuire & Miranda, 2008); and

**WHEREAS**, Black and other children of color have less access to properly trained and credentialed teachers as compared to White children (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016); and

**WHEREAS**, The widespread use of punitive approaches to discipline and inconsistent policies and practices often disproportionately impact minoritized students (Skiba et al., 2011).

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that NASP supports the following steps regarding its organizational practices:

- NASP commits to prioritizing, centering, and elevating the voices of BIPOC school psychologists and researchers by engaging in efforts to obtain adequate representation in leadership roles, position statement and resolution writing teams, publications and resource development, and the profession and NASP membership and by publicly acknowledging their contributions to the field.
- NASP will engage in targeted recruitment of members to increase representational diversity and be intentional about including the voices of minoritized individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> BIPOC is an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color.

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- NASP will promote the multicultural responsiveness of all leaders and staff to include ongoing professional development for NASP leaders/staff on antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion, thus reducing the burden of minoritized members.
- NASP will engage in ongoing dialogue and self-reflection about antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion issues within the organization and the profession.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NASP commits to the following actions in the public policy and educational practice work of the organization:

- Prioritize the perspectives and viewpoints of BIPOC students, families, and communities in addressing educational inequities and developing solutions.
- Engage in active efforts to dismantle systemic racism in education, including policy and practice, such as opposing and replacing the use of racist mascots and school names, to ensure fair and equitable treatment of BIPOC and other marginalized communities.
- Advocate for policy and practice that protects the rights of all students to be educated in safe schools and communities free from prejudice and discrimination.
- Advocate for equitable school funding policies that prioritize allocation of funds for a community according to a population-based needs assessment.
- Advocate for federal and state initiatives that seek to diversify the profession, including efforts that reduce financial barriers to pursuing a graduate degree in school psychology.
- Advocate for policies that promote equitable access to adequate staffing levels of appropriately credentialed, diverse school-based mental health staff, reflective of the demographics of the school community, to support students.
- Support accountability standards and disaggregate data collection and reporting to ensure schools are providing high-quality education and supports to all students.
- Advocate for nonbiased admission practices for gifted and talented programs in elementary grades and selective middle and high schools.
- Engage in efforts to ensure that students of color have equitable access to experienced and effective teachers who are serving in fields aligned to their area of preparation and credentialing.
- Advocate for increased investments in mental health, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practices that balance physical and psychological safety.
- Promote 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.
- Advocate for the elimination of zero tolerance discipline policies and limiting of exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately impact students from minoritized backgrounds.
- Oppose the overhardening of schools in which surveillance and facial recognition technology is utilized, as these technologies can be detrimental to the psychological safety of students and can negatively impact overall school climate.
- Support federal and state policies, including funding, to enable school districts to include antiracist and social justice curricula and implement antiracist policies, procedures, and practices that enable equitable opportunity and outcomes.
- Work to ensure that schools collect, analyze, and report disaggregated data related to special education referrals, special education identification, and discipline referrals to identify and address disproportionality and inequities for marginalized groups.
- Work to ensure that schools are providing culturally responsive and evidence-based supports to minoritized students.

- Provide opportunities for implicit bias training and education for school psychologists and graduate educators, which will highlight the significance of increasing diversity and teach techniques for bias mitigation.
- Increase professional development offerings focused on antiracism, cultural humility, ongoing personal reflection, cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, and trauma-informed practices.
- Develop and disseminate resources that empower school psychologists to commit to advocating for antiracist and social justice initiatives in their practice and acknowledging their own implicit biases.
- Provide professional development for school psychologists on appropriate special education assessment and identification methods that do not disproportionately identify non-White students as disabled.
- Advocate for the development of systematic approaches to assess and monitor institutional climate, both within NASP and within schools, ensuring that implicit bias and its potential consequences are understood, and that people of traditionally underrepresented backgrounds feel welcome, respected, and are met with high expectations.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that NASP encourages graduate education programs to consider the following efforts to promote antiracism among graduate students and faculty:

- Build faculty capacity to engage in antiracism and to embed antiracism and other social justice matters in coursework.
- Include exposure to best practices in combating racism for school psychology graduate students. This includes but is not limited to embedding issues of antiracism, social justice, and culturally responsive work within the curriculum (not just within one course), facilitating student self-awareness and growth as it relates to issues of racial bias and injustice, facilitating student engagement in racial justice activities and projects, and providing explicit supports to BIPOC students in the field.
- Offer school psychology graduate faculty opportunities to engage critically around antiracism, beginning at the individual level and permeating throughout all aspects of their roles as faculty, including providing mentorship and support for persons from all racial backgrounds and working to ensure that their program as a whole is not engaging in racist practices, either consciously or out of the program's awareness. Programs should consider ways to encourage the practice of cultural humility.
- Develop mechanisms to promote efforts to combat racism within their graduate program and to hold faculty accountable for specific actions.
- Engage in efforts to recruit and retain minoritized students and faculty.
- Support the professional growth and mentorship of minoritized faculty members.
- Model support and respect for marginalized communities who have been targets of systematic racism.

**IN CONCLUSION**, many school psychologists, educators, families, and other community stakeholders with missions aligned with NASP's work have called for antiracist actions like those mentioned above. NASP unequivocally denounces racism and other injustices that plague our society. NASP believes that advocating for antiracist laws, policies, and practices is essential to fulfilling NASP's vision that all children and youth thrive in school, at home, and throughout life and can create a more equitable society for all of us.

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