

November 2021

Calling All Change Agents for Educational Equity

By Terri Tchorzynski | November 2021



“A rising tide lifts all boats” is the response I received from a professional peer when advocating for intentional support to close achievement gaps amongst various student groups. His perspective was disheartening and discouraging because he was a building leader who was adamant about making the point that when academic achievement improves for the student population as a whole, then naturally all student groups will see improvement in results. But . . . the gap still remains.

Sadly, this disparity in measurable success did not present itself as a new concept for me as both a former data-driven school counselor and now national consultant who works with school counselors across the nation. I continuously push myself and others out of our comfort zones to disaggregate data to truly identify student needs and expose systemic barriers that may be impeding success for historically marginalized student populations in our school systems. Time and time again, I would work with others to unveil “dirty data” (as I would call it) that would consist of examples such as:

- overall decreasing numbers of behavior referrals, but Hispanic males consisting of 65 percent of the discipline referrals
- improved postsecondary attainment rates, but ELL students and Black males showing limited improvement
- 75 percent of senior scholarships going to White female students who only consist of 40 percent of the student population

So, I ask you, as a student advocate and change agent: What data will you use to tell the story of your students?

As stated in ASCA’s position statement on [The School Counselor and Anti-Racist Practices](#), “The role of the school counselor in ensuring anti-racist practices is to enhance awareness, obtain culturally

responsive knowledge and skills, and *engage in action through advocacy*.” A professional friend and colleague of mine, Dr. Rebecca Pianta from Santa Ana Unified School District in California, stated it best when she said school counselors have one of three choices to make when addressing systemic barriers that impede student success. She said we can choose to either *move with, stand still, or move against/interrupt* unjust systems.

Regardless of our decision, we are a part of the structure that has an impact on students so we have to begin to ask ourselves, what does being a change agent for educational equity mean to each of us individually as student advocates? As Trish Hatch wrote, “Each and every decision to speak or not speak, to act or not act, demonstrates the potential to impact students’ future career options and life opportunities” (“Use of Data,” 2014).

If the pandemic has taught us anything about the educational system, it is that we have an obligation to our students to shift practices in a way that will better serve the needs of all. As a profession, we are uniquely positioned to question the status quo by moving away from the “rising tides lift all boats” mentality to a more centralized focus on advocating for systems that are designed around equitable outcomes. It is time for us to embrace our title of systemic change agents and be the conduit of change that our students are waiting for. The MSCA walks beside you in this critical work!

Contact Terri Tchorzynski, MSCA president and 2017 National School Counselor of the Year, at ttchorzynski@gmail.com.

Racial Justice: A Channel of Peace

By Lori Hartman and Betsy Kanagawa | November 2021



September 11, 2021, was the 20th anniversary of horrible tragedy, hatred and attacks upon our country. This year, commemorations and reflections about that day amplified the personal stories of those deeply impacted. School counselors working in the profession during that moment in our history undoubtedly hold sharp memories of the day and the fear that gripped us. Collectively, the country recognized that nothing would be the same – that something was missing, something was lost, something changed. We needed to act. Our actions after that day were driven by patriotism, civics, the Constitution, and our religious and spiritual values. Racial justice actions are persistent, concrete, continuous actions that address what is great about America and what we value about our community.

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

This article however, is not really about September 11th; this article is about September 12th. It is true that something was missing and something was lost, but many of us also found our courage. I cannot speak to whether or not our country was unified on that day, but I knew that it was my responsibility to bring what I could to rebuild what had been lost and to find what was missing. It seemed to me that hatred of strangers had exploded in our world. I did not believe that I could change global perceptions of the “other,” but it was my patriotic duty to make a difference in my building. I did not come to this work from the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors; I came to it for deeply personal reasons. Before Simon Sinek had introduced the concept of a personal “why,” I had discovered mine. Hatred had prevailed on September 11th, and I could not let it win going into September 12th. I simply was not willing to live in a world of hatred and violence. I formed groups with diverse members and intentionally created a safe space for discussion around different life experiences and cultural perception. My co-leader and I wanted to give a voice to differences at school and illuminate the empathy inherent in each student toward others. (This sounds peaceful. It was not. It was often messy and uncomfortable.)

What Goes Around

Sometimes I feel that because the earth is round, we face the same issues over and over again as it turns. Over the course of a lifetime and a career we must continue to be an instrument of peace; we must point out the hatred and take action to address the injustice. Twenty years after these events, during a pandemic and in another time of unprecedented tragedy and grief, school counselors continue to find their “why” while simultaneously addressing racial, ethnic, systemic and economic injustices. We must show through our actions that we believe in equality and justice for all of our students.

James Baldwin reminds us of two driving principles for anti-racism and school counseling:

- ***“I can’t believe what you say because I see what you do.”***
- ***“Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them. ”***

Resources for Your Program or “Why?”

Michigan Resources

[*MDE Memo*](#)

[*Social Justice & Anti-Racist Educator Resources*](#)

ASCA Resources

[*Anti-Racism Resources*](#)

[*The School Counselor and Equity for All Students*](#)

[*Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Specialist*](#)

[*Interrupting Racism: Race & Equity in Your Program*](#)

Learning For Justice

Learning For Justice: School Wide Lessons:

Don't Say Nothing : Silence Speaks Volumes-The Students are Listening

PBS

You Have an Anti-Racist Book List: Now What? Strategies after reading

Harvard

Implicit Bias Test - [Take a Test](#)

ADL

How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom?

National Museum of African American History and Culture

I Am an Educator Talking About Race

Contact Lori Hartman, MSCA Social Justice & Equity chair, at lorihartman@whitehallschools.net, and Betsy Kanagawa, MSCA Middle School Level Vice President, at kanagae@wbsdweb.com

Change Is Gonna Come

By Marsha Rutledge, Ph.D. | November 2021





There is a familiar song in the Black culture, written and first performed by singer, songwriter and civil-rights activist Sam Cooke. On Feb. 7, 1964, Cooke debuted “A Change Is Gonna Come” on “The Tonight Show” to convey an urgent message to a national audience. I believe we have, once again, reached a stage of change in which this song speaks volumes.

As we continue to struggle through the COVID-19 pandemic, there are other pandemics Black people are subjected to daily – continued racism, discrimination, inequities and police brutality. In the last year, I am finding that educators of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are hungry for ways to make the system better and meet the unique needs of their Black students.

If not now, when? And if not you, who? The reality is that the when is now and the who is you. We all need to understand that this change begins in each of us. We must be ready for the knowingly uncomfortable social justice and advocacy work that lies ahead and be prepared to address some of the foundational issues that continue to plague educational systems.

As America re-imagines the structure of K–12 schools, its curriculum, academic processes and in-class experiences, it is time to focus on dismantling inequities and systemic policies and procedures that have negatively affected Black students and other students of color for too long. As schools are situated within communities that are struggling to recover, we must recognize and understand that what students are experiencing in their homes and their communities can and will manifest in our schools. Therefore, educators are tasked with implementing appropriate supports for student success.

School counselors, in particular, have to educate themselves on appropriate trauma responses in an effort to not cause further distress to their students. We must also keep in mind that the act of “doing nothing” leaves open the possibility for more trauma to develop or resurface. We must take a proactive approach to work with students after racial incidents occur. We cannot stop there. School counselors must put into action the ASCA themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. If your efforts are not continuous and purposeful in addressing systemic issues, a process necessary for systemic change, then you are not working to solve many of the problems that have preceded and contributed to our current climate.

Where to Begin

Educate yourself: Know and understand the historical underpinnings behind racism.

Know yourself: Take time for reflection and introspection. Know how this work is affecting you. Acknowledge your beliefs and values regarding Black Lives Matter, and recognize the best way to support Black and Brown children.

Acknowledge the issues: Be respectful, thoughtful and intentional about that acknowledgment, and have a plan to move forward. Lifelong activist Dena Simmons, Ed.D., wrote, "When we see racism – whether at the individual or policy level – we must have the courage to act."

Never stop advocating: This is not a one-time conversation but a series of discussions and interventions leading to change.

Now is the time to consider whether your school counseling program needs restructuring. The ASCA National Model provides a framework to guide you as you build a culturally responsive school counseling program. Begin with an audit of your program. In addition to the [ASCA program assessment](#), I also recommend you find an equity inventory to identify possible gaps that may have gone unnoticed. As you meet with your school counseling advisory council, gather the necessary data and input. It is vital to the overhaul or refinement of your school counseling program to hear varying perspectives on school climate and the impact of the program on the students it serves.

During your annual administrative conference, talk with leadership about your focus and your goals toward social justice and dismantling inequitable practices and procedures. Think about holding focus groups to hear directly from your students about your program's effectiveness in this area. Once you have valuable data, create a goal around school climate and/or cultural diversity; then create your interventions and programs with cultural responsiveness in mind. Several resources that can assist in that work include, "Making Diversity Work" (Grothaus & Johnson, 2012) and "Closing the Achievement Gap" (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Zaretta Hammond's "The Culturally Responsive Brain" is another excellent resource.

Gather Others

Wondering how you can help others invest in this work? Unfortunately, some may never understand the gravity of the trauma inflicted by systemic racism and inequity. These individuals may also never understand the call for social justice and advocacy. However, as school counselors, we're tasked with addressing inequities and advocating for all students, as detailed in the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors.

A.3.c.: Review school and student data to assess needs, including, but not limited to, data on disparities that may exist related to gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and/or other relevant classifications.

B.2.i.: Advocate for equitable school counseling program policies and practices for all students and stakeholders.

B.3.i.: Monitor and expand personal multicultural and social-justice advocacy awareness knowledge and skills to be an effective culturally competent school counselor. Understand how prejudice,

privilege and various forms of oppression based on ethnicity, racial identity, age, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, appearance and living situations (e.g., foster care, homelessness, incarceration) affect students and stakeholders.

These mandates and other ethical standards and professional competencies guide us in responsibly implementing school counseling programs to meet all students' needs. Here are a few other vital tips.

Show the data: *Some will never understand inequities until they hear it, see it, or live it, so seize your opportunity by showing the data. We often think of data in quantitative terms (numbers and statistics). However, qualitative data allows for stories and lived experiences to give powerful representations of why this work is essential. Support your cause with pictures, graphics and videos, such as the video of the 6-year-old scared for his life, footage of the young Black boy singing "I Just Want to Live," a picture of the history of Black trauma. Explain the rationale and reasoning behind Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter. Conduct a needs assessment of students and faculty to hear from them directly and identify the specific needs within your building. Discuss responses in your school counseling advisory council meetings. It is important to know the perspective circulating in the community.*

Be prepared with your ask: *What is it that you want from your administrators? Your leaders? Your allies? Be prepared with factual knowledge about students' needs and with suggestions for support, but be flexible enough to hear ideas from others.*

Anticipate pushback: *Don't take it personally. Not everyone is ready for the conversation. Be prepared with your response.*

Identify your community: *These are the allies, accomplices and co-conspirators willing and ready to work with you to make a real difference.*

Don't give up: *Despite the hard conversations, the risks, and the paths you may walk alone, the end result will be worth the effort, for you and – more important – your students.*

Social justice and advocacy work is uncomfortable and, at times, risky. School counselors have to move out of their comfort zones and do the work they have been called to do – improving outcomes for all students. In doing so, they can focus on the apparent and immediate needs of their students of color; otherwise, it's as if they are saying that all lives don't matter.

Marsha Rutledge, Ph.D., is a former school counselor and an assistant professor and coordinator of school counseling at Longwood University. She can be reached at rutledgeml@longwood.edu.

Stand Up, Stand Together

By Damien Sweeney, Ed.D. | November 2021



Our world is finally opening its eyes to the fact that, for so long, Black lives have been treated as dispensable by many. Health care, law enforcement, our economic system and, yes, even our nation's educational systems have had a long history of treating Black lives differently.

The one thing I can absolutely say about all school counselors, no matter where you are from or where you work, is that you got into this field because you have a heart to help and heal. That's great news, and this is your time to continue doing just that. This article offers some next steps school counselors across America can take to fight for social justice and equity.

Remember, equality and equity are not the same. Equity is the process of providing what each individual needs to help create an equal playing field. [The Opportunity Myth](#) verified that the oppression and discrimination found throughout history are still happening to Black (and Latinx) students in schools. This suggests we have a systemic problem with the way we teach our traditionally marginalized students.

In essence, society oppresses, discriminates and creates negative fictions/narratives about people of color. These fictions suggest that Black people are violent, criminal, animalistic, etc., according to a

2019 paper from Forward Promise. Next, society creates dangerous actions toward people of color that can manifest themselves as police brutality (George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Botham Jean, Philando Castile) or the murder of innocent Black men and women as a result of flat-out racism, mislabeling and negative stereotypes by other citizens (Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin).

These two actions, coupled together, can give Black people and other people of color harmful internal feelings such as, "I'm no good. I'm not smart. I'm worthless. I'm unlovable. I'm wicked or evil." These lead to destructive external reactions, which may look like harm to one's self or others. It is time for us to each reflect on how our individual perceptions, actions and/or lack of action perpetuate dehumanization on a micro level in all that we do.

Where can school counselors start in the fight for social justice?

Educate Yourself to the Complexity

In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," Paulo Freire wrote about how we must liberate students who have lived within a system of oppression. First, we must understand the dynamics of systems of oppression, educate ourselves about how these function within education, and understand our role to mediate both dehumanization and dynamics of oppression that exist often without question. These are invisible forces that for most of us have never been articulated. We each need to do the difficult work of identifying and then challenging the biases we hold that were programmed into us – without shame and without blame.

Use Your Advisory Council

These stakeholders can discuss how school counselors can address the race-based stress and trauma Black people are forced to endure throughout the country (broadly) and in their schools (specifically).

Use Tier 1 Direct Student Services

This includes school counseling lessons for all students. Talk to students about racism, oppression and discrimination. Teach them how to be upstanders. If you are like me, you may, at times, be concerned about the safety of the upstander along with the target of racism or bullying. Create a protocol allowing students to report instances of racism safely and explain this protocol in your Tier 1 classroom lessons.

When creating your lessons, remember you are working with students from various backgrounds who sometimes sit in desks all day long. Can you create an engaging lesson? Can you get your students moving? How can you create a truly safe space for students that allows them to do most of the talking?

Encourage the teacher to stay in the room and participate in the activity if possible. Now you are teaching a lesson through a social/emotional learning (SEL) lens and also modeling the importance of SEL for teachers so they can incorporate it in future lessons.

Raise Awareness of Microaggressions through Tier 2 Services

In every school, it is nearly inevitable that some students, families or colleagues have been a victim of racism or witnessed it. Sometimes racism is not overt. "Microaggressions are comments or actions that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally express a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group" (Merriam-Webster, 2021). These subtle comments and actions add up to be extremely hurtful.

For the targets of racism (overt or microaggressions), Tier 2 direct student services will be needed, as individual or small-group counseling. As a music lover, I often incorporate music in my small groups. Music can bring us together and the right song often finds the words to convey exactly what we are feeling. What emotions does "Home" by Machine Gun Kelly or "Freedom" by Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar produce in your students? So many great songs are out there, and you and your students can choose songs that convey emotion and produce a foundation for dialogue. I've also found that giving students a blank sheet of paper and a pen to write or draw helps them find the words or gives them a chance to connect what they are feeling to a piece of art.

Here is the hard part. Tier 2 direct student services for race-related stress and trauma are not only for victims of racism. These services are also for students who perform racist acts (sometimes unknowingly). What will individual or small-group counseling look like for these students? Remember, school counselors help all students learn and grow. We intervene to teach the whole child, so you need a plan to address these students' actions and how you will maintain your composure during difficult conversations.

Address Tier 3 Needs

What systems are we using to identify students in crisis at risk of harming themselves or others? Is there any way our own conditioned lens causes us to miss students in desperate need of our support?

Consider both data housed inside the school's computer systems and data collected from being present in our school. Data drives our work, and we are fortunate to have a bird's-eye view of our entire school and the data that shows progress or obstacles. I like to refer to A (attendance), B (behavior), C (course passing- otherwise known as achievement) data. Perhaps our data-driven framework can expand to include data collected on student voice that we can explore by student groups (poverty, race, special education, etc.) to drive our programs and services.

Explore School Trends

Are your school's traditionally underrepresented students' attendance, behavioral or course-passing data deficient compared with their white counterparts? If so, why? Are your school's traditionally underrepresented students getting the same opportunities and access to gifted and talented programs, Advanced Placement classes, career and technical education and dual-enrollment classes as their counterparts? If not, why?

These are systems questions requiring us to look in the mirror and ask questions that are tough for entire organizations (schools or districts) to face. To help, look at the [Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization](#). This framework should not be completed by school

administrators only, but should include voices from all stakeholders – teachers, students, families, community members – and strive to create real change for schools.

Further Education

If you haven't seen the [ASCA Town Hall: Racism in Schools](#), please do so. The panelists remind us that our willingness to take risks, speak out and become vulnerable is invaluable. They address the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors. As a quick reminder, creating equitable policies to give your minority students opportunities is, quite literally, your job; see ASCA Ethical Standards B.2.i. and B.2.o.

Because many school counselors across the country don't have the lived experience of racism, knowing how to facilitate conversations about race, racism or race-related stress and trauma may be difficult. You may not know where to start. At the Kentucky Department of Education, we created the document [Guidance on How Districts Can Facilitate Conversations About Race-based Stress and Trauma](#). Some of the first steps (from this document) you can take in your journey include:

- Provide Tier 1 instruction to students and staff members about cultural humility, equity, etc.
- Implement Tier 2 intervention services for students and staff members who are struggling with understanding these concepts or for students and staff members who are victimized by events that have happened in their own lives, their own community or the world.
- Prepare information about Tier 3 intervention services with community agencies for students and staff members who might have reached a point where they are a danger to themselves or others.

Last, find comfort in your discomfort. There is no single approach to facilitate lessons or interventions around race-based stress and trauma. Many of us may stumble through the school counseling lessons or interventions we've created to address these issues – this is normal and your willingness to start these conversations is the first step.

Don't try to be anyone but yourself. You are enough, and by leaning into these issues while having a desire to fight for social justice, you will find the best way possible to reach your students and educate them on the many negative effects of racism, oppression and racialized trauma.

Damien Sweeney, Ed.D., is the former program coordinator for comprehensive school counseling with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). He recently has been named director of diversity, equity and inclusion at KDE. He can be reached at damien.sweeney@education.ky.gov.

A Lifelong Process: Cultural Competency

By Monica Bryant | November 2021



Cultural competency is the ongoing, lifelong process by which people learn to value and respond respectfully to individuals of all cultures. When we start to view our students and colleagues through a cultural competency lens, we begin to build lasting relationships and rapport by truly getting to know them for who they are as individuals. Cultural competency requires us to intentionally examine our own thoughts and behaviors and their impact on others.

When I was in high school, either I was the only person of color or one of two in my Honors and AP courses. Because of this, teachers often wanted me to speak on behalf of my race whenever we were discussing racial tensions in books or the news. I also received compliments on how well I knew a topic, even though no one else in class would receive a compliment. I even had a teacher who continuously mispronounced my name, no matter how many times I corrected her.

As an adult, I have been followed in stores and profiled solely based on the color of my skin. However, the encounters I experienced in high school stick with me more because my teachers should have known better. They should have received better training. They should have set a better example for my fellow classmates. They should have understood that it's not good to single students out based on race. They should have tried harder to say my name.

These sorts of things are still happening today to students, but there's a simple step we can all take to help make a difference – cultural competency training. Our experiences help shape us. As an educator, my personal experiences help me know the importance of cultural competency in the school setting.

Cultural competency reduces racial and gender profiling. It also reduces the disproportionality of students referred to special education and increases the number of students of color getting referred to gifted and talented programs. Finally, it reduces the number of discipline referrals of students of color to numbers equal to their white counterparts.

What Is Culture?

Culture is learned, from our families, communities, religions, schools and many other aspects of our lives. Culture is learned over the course of our lives through activities we participate in and practice. Culture is also normative, setting the standard for speech, behavior, writing, etc. When we process these standards over time, they become our culture.

Culture affects how we see the world and guides how to act toward each other. Most important, culture isn't stagnant. It's dynamic and changing. The context in which an action is taken, a word is said or an expression given is important to each culture. I have seen cultural competency show up in schools in three areas: stereotypes, implicit bias and microaggressions.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are over-generalized beliefs about a particular group or class of people. By stereotyping, we infer that a person has characteristics we assume all members of that group have, whether positive, negative, explicit or implicit.

To help combat stereotypes:

- **Create identity-safe classrooms and schools**, where every student's identity is intentionally acknowledged and valued.
- **Foster growth mindsets** to counter the fixed messages in stereotypes.
- **Emphasize high standards and capability for all students.**
- **Provide feedback** that motivates students to improve.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is the unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes and categories affecting behavior and understanding. It often predicts how we will behave more accurately than our conscious values and can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievement.

Implicit bias affects students in several ways. First is discipline, in which policies result in the over-representation of students of color in suspensions, expulsions and referrals for more subjective infractions, such as defiance or disrespect. Students with disabilities are twice as likely to receive a suspension than students without disabilities. Second is special education, where there is over-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Third, gifted programs where Black and Latino students are less likely to be screened for gifted programs than white and Asian students.

However, Black students are three times more likely to be referred if they have a Black teacher. Fourth, educators may have mindsets that underestimate the intellectual capacity of culturally and linguistically diverse students and often girls. Fifth, having policies that inadvertently place students of color in remedial or low-track courses. Finally, educators who have ways of thinking and/or talking about students and families that diminish or underestimate them.

To combat implicit bias:

- **Identify and acknowledge the bias within ourselves.** When our own stereotypes manifest, we can ask ourselves what is actually happening in the moment. We can take action to change the bias by asking questions and engaging with people who are different from us.
- **Develop an inclusive classroom and school climate** to mediate potential biases and support developing sensitivity and self-awareness.
- **Solicit feedback** from colleagues (after observation) and from students via evaluations or small-group sessions.
- Expose students and staff to **individuals who contradict widely held stereotypes** via speaker series, videos or professional development.
- **Gather data**, especially around discipline outcomes, to identify trends and patterns.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions, as defined by Dr. Derald Wing Sue, a professor of counseling psychology, are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.” People are usually unaware they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the recipient of the exchange.

There are three categories of microaggressions: microinvalidations, micro-insults and microassaults. Micro-invalidations exclude, negate or invalidate thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. Microinsults are often unconscious behavioral or verbal comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person’s racial identity. Microassaults are conscious, deliberate and either subtle or explicit biased attitudes, beliefs or behaviors that are communicated.

Microaggressions can include failing to learn or pronounce or continuing to mispronounce students’ names; scheduling tests and project due dates on religious or cultural holidays; expecting students of any particular groups to “represent” the perspectives of others of their group; assuming the gender of any student; excluding students from accessing student activities due to high financial cost; and complimenting non-white students on their use of “good English.”

To address microaggressions:

- Understand the **difference between intention and impact**; focus on how the act made others feel and address their needs.
- Be aware of **how colorblindness can make students feel**. Saying you “don’t see color” minimizes that student’s cultural background, implying that something might be wrong with it.

- Understand that **many international students are not familiar with U.S. slang** words or other language idiosyncrasies.
- Know that **expressing political opinions may silence students** who disagree, because educators hold a position of power.
- Make sure your **objectives in bringing in guest speakers** are clear to you, students, and the speaker.
- **Speak from your own experience without comparing** your oppression to others'.

Cultural competency is a lifelong process and the first step toward becoming culturally competent is realizing you probably aren't. To become more culturally competent one must value diversity, have capacity for cultural self-assessment, be conscious of the dynamics that occur when cultures interact and have knowledge of different cultural practices and world views.

Helping Colleagues

Here are some general strategies for school counselors to help colleagues become more culturally responsive:

- *Workshops for faculty development focused on building cultural competence and culturally responsive philosophy, curriculum, instructional practices, etc.*
- *Guest speakers to address special topics*
- *Inventory of current building and classroom practices*
- *Departmental task group to build philosophy, curriculum, assessments and instructional practices*
- *Reading a book together to promote cultural responsiveness and discuss relevance to your school*
- *Regular consultation on implementation and practice*
- *School counselor/teacher collaboration focused on development of teachers' cultural awareness*
- *Individual and small-group inclusion interventions*

Cultural competency leads to many benefits: Student engagement rises, student outcomes increase, student self-esteem increases, and students' strengths are recognized and utilized. Dr. Ray Terrell of Miami University said it best: "An important aspect of cultural competence is not so much what we learn about other people but what we learn about ourselves and our reactions to other people." Every day is an opportunity to change our mindsets, learn a little more and become more culturally responsive school counselors.

Monica Bryant has been in education for 10 years, currently residing in Las Vegas, Nev., and can be reached at mbryant924@gmail.com.

Supporting Students After Racial Incidents

By Derek Francis | November 2021



In February 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old, unarmed, Black man was shot while jogging in a Georgia neighborhood. The video of this event was released at the end of May. Soon after, we saw a video of a woman in Central Park attempt to criminalize a Black birdwatcher for asking her to leash her dog. In March 2020, Breonna Taylor was shot by police in her own home. Then, on May 25, 2020, in my hometown of Minneapolis, we watched the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer in a horrific video taken by a bystander.

These traumatic events have ripped open emotional wounds. Our students are hurting, and they need us. But how do we respond? As our country and our schools try to heal and make changes to a fundamentally flawed system, we must actively engage students in conversations about race. Our students are looking for ways to talk about and process a wide range of emotions. School counselors are called to do the social/emotional work of fighting racism.

Knowing how to support students after major racial incidents can be challenging. Most school counselors graduate with only one three-credit course focusing on multicultural/cross-cultural counseling and never had the conversation or training to support students in these types of events. Some of us worry we'll say the wrong thing or worry that it's not our place to take the lead. We have to set those fears aside, and trust that our compassion and our desire to listen and learn will pave the way for fruitful discussions and healing.

This is our chance to speak up as school counselors and create a safe space for all students to process and navigate the recent events. As school counselors, we have the essential skills to support all students.

Speak Up and Say Something

It may be hard and outside of your comfort zone, especially for white school counselors, but it's important to speak up and work to effect change. Your students need you. They have watched and experienced so much trauma recently and they are scared.

It is our duty to create a safe space for their developing minds to process what is going on. We must all consider and address our bias and privilege to facilitate compassionate, authentic conversations around race. Listen and let your students know that you will do better to work for change, that you want to learn and that you will support them unflinchingly. I encourage you to talk to your own children and family and to your community about what is going on. Families of color cannot opt out of these conversations because these conversations keep their children safe. White families need to move through their discomfort to address this challenging topic. We cannot continue to consider this topic off limits simply because it feels unsettling. Do not wait for your students or staff of color to bring things up. Take the lead, and beat them to it.

Reach Out to Students

School counselors must do the active social/emotional outreach to students. Sending a message designed to let all students know you are aware of the recent events and the challenges they bring is an important first step. This type of messaging is crucial, especially in a virtual learning space, where we miss out on casual interactions and natural class conversations that occur in person. Being intentional about how you will address race and equity is vital. What race and equity-based professional development will you and peers attend to address gaps in your skillset? What classroom lessons, small groups and individual counseling sessions will you make available to have conversations on race and identity?

Students need a comfortable space to engage with peers, to hear others' perspectives and experiences, and to empathize and provide support on race issues. Some students also need a space to find affinity. In my experience working with students of color, I have seen the pain on students' faces when they took the leap of faith to share how emotionally draining a racial event at school or in the community has been, only to have others invalidate their emotions. Validating students' race and cultural identity is a key component in academic achievement, college and career planning and social/emotional well-being. If you feel nervous or unprepared to facilitate these kinds of

conversations, prioritize this as your own personal needs assessment. Self-reflection and understanding your own bias, privilege and microaggressions is paramount in doing this work. No matter how many resources you have, the work begins in your heart. You must truly have a heart for supporting students, whether they are Black, Somali, white, wearing a hijab, documented or undocumented. Attending professional trainings is one part of awareness, but we all must move from awareness to action.

Help Students Process

Race incidents can be extremely traumatic for students and staff, particularly those of color. The impact of historical racial trauma during a global pandemic has shaken us to our core. We must help students open up and process the different triggers these events are causing for them. Ask your students or friends of color what it feels like to be pulled over for speeding and fear for your life. How are our Asian students handling the recent increase of microaggressions? Who are the underrepresented populations in your community, and what are ways you can offer support? Be mindful and empathize with your students and their experiences. They may be experiencing racial battle fatigue.

Students may share things with you that you can't relate to or don't understand. Have the cultural humility to learn to see from the other person's viewpoint. One thing many educators worry about in doing multicultural work is making a mistake. Having humility and asking for grace and forgiveness is key in this process. This is a lifelong journey, not a checkbox. Also, remember that you can turn to on the fundamentals of empathy, active listening, appropriate follow-up questions and reflection. This work is on the shoulders of all school counselors, not just school counselors of color. I am confident that as a collective we can help students of all races feel more connected and achieve their academic and postsecondary goals.

Derek Francis is manager of counseling services, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, Minn. He can be reached at derek.francis@mpls.k12.mn.us.

Fighting Injustice: Your First Amendment Rights

By Carolyn Stone | November 2021



You joined the rallying cry in the summer of racial reckoning following the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. This unique time in the country's history stirred in you an urgency to seize the moment to bring important conversations about respecting diversity to the students in your school. Your district has a content-neutral policy banning political conversations and symbols. You are told the Black Lives Matter movement is political and, therefore, falls under the content-neutral policy. What are the limits of your First Amendment rights, and what tools can you legally use to raise your students' awareness to injustices within the district's content-neutral policy?

First Amendment rights within the school environment have required special consideration from the courts for more than five decades. The First Amendment says Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble. Speech is not only written and oral speech but also expression such as wearing political clothing. Students' First Amendment rights are a complicated, fact-intensive, case-determinant area of law; however, the law is even more complicated for educators. There are many pitfalls and places where exercising First Amendment rights can go wrong for an educator.

Court cases defining the freedom and limitations of the First Amendment in schools began with *Tinker v. Des Moines*. In December 1965, students Mary Beth and John Tinker and Christopher Eckhardt were suspended for wearing black armbands to school to show support of a truce in the Vietnam War. The Tinkers lost their freedom of speech court case in both the district court and the Eighth Circuit Court. However, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered the final opinion in favor of the students in a 7–2 majority. Justice Abe Fortas, writing for the majority, said students and faculty don't lose their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate.

In the decades to follow *Tinker*, courts have heard challenges to school speech, such as the landmark case *Bethel School District v. Fraser*, 1986. This Supreme Court decision supported the district's decision to discipline high schooler Fraser for delivering a lewd speech with sexual references to the student body during government nominations.

Although there are obvious areas of speech that aren't protected, such as the "vulgar" speech Fraser gave in the *Bethel* case, there are also limits to areas of speech usually considered protected speech. The test for protected speech for students and educators is substantial disruption. The question is, "Can or has the speech caused a substantial disruption?" Speech can be limited if there is a good faith, reasonably founded belief that the speech will lead to a disruption or has led to a disruption. The standard for fettering student speech is very high. The administration cannot limit speech on a loosely held belief that the speech might disrupt; there has to be valid arguments to forecast such a disruption. For example, the administration can preemptively suppress expressive speech in the form of a confederate flag on a shirt if they can foresee a disruption with facts such as the community considers the flag a symbol of racism (*Barr v. Lafron*, 2008) or the flag has caused disruption in the community or in neighboring schools (*Defoe v. Spivy*, 2010). The court in *Defoe* extended its opinion to also recognize a school district's substantial interest in helping students foster "both knowledge and democratic responsibility."

School boards are using content-neutral policies to defensively limit speech. These policies usually dictate that no writing can be brought on campus in the form of clothing, banners, bumper stickers, etc., unless it is school spirit symbols.

Educators' Rights

Free speech for educators has some overlap with student rights and restrictions, but educators' free speech is an even more complicated, fact-intensive, case-determinant area of law. Educators' First Amendment rights aren't absolute – far from it – and if shown to interfere with the learning process this provides districts with solid grounds for dismissal. Three recent cases demonstrate this.

Bryan Craig wrote the book "It's Her Fault," a self-help book designed to teach women how to better please men sexually. Craig was a high school counselor who used his job throughout his book as proof that he knew about females, citing in the forward that half his students were females and, therefore, he understood "the fairer sex." The school district fired him, and he sued under First Amendment rights. Craig lost, not based on his right to speak in the form of his book, but based on what he said in the book about how he sexualized all females, which undermined his ability to do his job.

In August 2020, Patricia Crawford, a school counselor, lost her court battle to have her job reinstated after contributing to a Facebook thread criticizing students who boycotted school to protest President Trump's immigration policy. The Fourth Appellate District Court called Crawford's remarks on the thread "immoral conduct" and called Crawford "evidently unfit for service." Crawford's conduct gained significant notoriety, which negatively affected her relationship with students, administration and the community, according to the court.

Facebook postings can result in firings if the message gets out and stratifies educators' ability to do their job, such as the case of Miranda Little, an elementary school counselor, who in June 2020 resigned after racially insensitive social media posts were brought to the board's attention and personnel action was about to be taken.

Although school counselors don't leave their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate, these school counselors impeded their ability to be effective in the school community when exercising their First Amendment rights.

There are dozens of examples of educators being disciplined or fired for displaying symbols with Black Lives Matter in districts with content neutral policies. One such example was Lillian White, who was fired after defying several warnings to discontinue wearing a Black Lives Matter face mask. When school counselors enter into the equation in any way that can be construed as political, or as parents often call it "brainwashing" or "indoctrinating," this is when parents can get traction with school boards.

The key to your advocacy efforts in forwarding diversity and singling out particular groups who need more attention lies in the ASCA National Model, ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success, the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, the ASCA position statements and your knowledge of the school community and board policies. [Read more about using these tools.](#)

In a politically astute way, move forward with diversity work while keeping your finger on the pulse of who is opposing your work. Avoid creating a substantial disruption to the educational process. If you are a public school educator, you are a government employee and you are not allowed to interrupt the learning process. Support marginalized groups in a non-political way. For example, stress black lives matter as a necessary anti-racist message if Black Lives Matter is considered a political organization in your school community.

Find entry points in the effort to celebrate diversity. If not us, then who? If not now, then when? The time is right. Know your First Amendment rights and obligations, and use your ASCA tools to exercise your First Amendment rights in a politically astute manner so you can advantage all students in your charge.

Carolyn Stone, Ed.D., is a professor at the University of North Florida and chair of ASCA's Ethics Committee.

