



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS POSITION STATEMENT

Social Justice and Anti-Systemic Racism Practices

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 non-discriminatory 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. ([Adopted by the NASP Board of Directors](#), April 2017).

The California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) reaffirms its commitment to promote values and practices that facilitate safe educational environments and equitable educational practices, free from prejudice and discrimination. CASP recognizes the need to address issues of race, privilege, and power in a meaningful manner.

DEFINITIONS

Race: Refers to the categories into which society places individuals on the basis of physical characteristics (such as skin color, hair type, facial form, and eye shape). Though many believe that race is determined by biology, it is now widely accepted that this classification system was in fact created for social and political reasons. There are actually more genetic and biological differences within the racial groups defined by society than between different groups. ([Anti-Defamation League](#) (ADL), July 2020)

Systemic Racism: A combination of systems, institutions, and factors that advantage white people and for people of color, cause widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity. One person or even one group of people did not create systemic racism, rather it: (1) is grounded in the history of our laws and institutions which were created on a foundation of white supremacy; (2) exists in the institutions and policies that advantage white people and disadvantage people of color; and (3) takes places in interpersonal communication and behavior (e.g. slurs, bullying, offensive language) that maintains and supports systemic inequities and systemic racism. (ADL, July 2020)

RATIONALE

Racial and Ethnic Disparities continue to be an area of deep concern for California. When using the US Department of Education's formula for determining significant disproportionality (see [USDOE regulations](#) for more information), California's school districts do not fare well. When looking at the percentage of districts that are significantly disproportionate, here is how minority students are disproportionately impacted compared to White students:



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- Specific Learning Disability: Districts that are significantly disproportionate are identifying over 5 times as many Black (11.79%) and Latino students (10.74%) as White students (2.00%).
- Intellectual Disability: Districts that are significantly disproportionate are identifying 2 times as many Black students (4.28%) as White students (2%).
- Total Disciplinary Removals: Districts that are significantly disproportionate in removing students from their educational setting are 20 times more likely to remove a Black student (7.70%) than a White student (0.38%).

Poor children and children from minority groups are less likely to be identified as gifted and talented, and more likely to be identified as requiring special education services. They are also more likely to attend schools with a greater police presence, increasing the odds that they will enter the criminal justice system. (Nittle 2020) The school-to-prison pipeline is a product of systemic racism as it relates to exclusionary discipline and the involvement of law enforcement in response to adolescent behavior. These practices have been characterized by racial disparities and result in the removal of millions of African-American youth from the school system and their channeling into the prison system. (Cousineau 2010) Those who identify as LGBTQ, have disabilities, and/or are English Language Learners, are also channeled into the criminal justice system for minor school infractions and disciplinary matters, subjecting them to harsher punishments than their White peers for the same behaviors. The school-to-prison pipeline diminishes their educational opportunities and life trajectories. All educators – which includes every school employee – are key to ending the school-to-prison pipeline. (National Educational Association, 2020)

Research shows students amongst certain ethnic groups are disproportionately placed in special education programs (Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. 2002). Such groups have also been subject to increased disciplinary measures/actions of suspension, expulsion and/or placement in a more restrictive environment within special education settings (special day programs and non-public schools). The overidentification and further disciplinary actions produce inequitable opportunities to develop and build academic and social skills. According to Sullivan, Kozleski, & Smith, special education has been considered a paradox by some in that while it provides access to additional educational opportunities, it can also serve to stigmatize children and marginalize them from general education. As noted by Sullivan et al. (2009), there is ample evidence indicating that groups who are disproportionately represented in special education are negatively affected by factors such as stigmatization, lowered expectations, fewer opportunities to learn, substandard instruction, and isolation from the general education environment.

As school psychologists, we have an ethical responsibility to engage in social justice and anti-racist action. School psychology organizations and graduate education programs play an important role in shaping future generations of school psychologists to lead the mental health, educational and research, and advocacy initiatives that promote equity for the school personnel, students, families, and communities they serve. This is only possible if our field acknowledges, evaluates, and works to reconstruct existing systems, structures, and policies that lead to inequitable outcomes for some groups and not others. (NASP, 2020)



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CALL TO ACTION FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

- School psychologists have an ethical responsibility to end systemic racism and to promote antiracist policies and practices.
- To participate in policy development that promotes social justice and antiracist policies at the site, district, and professional level.
- To participate in district initiatives to address social justice and end the criminalization of student discipline.
- To collaborate with teachers, counselors, administrators, and mental health professionals in a unified effort to promote social justice through academic intervention and behavioral support.
- To advocate for early reading interventions that address instructional inequity and end the performance gap.
- To commit to Culturally Responsive Practices that involve: Understanding one's own identity and values. Knowing how one's own background influences perceptions. Gaining knowledge about the cultural background of others. Developing the skill to enhance practices which result in improved services and an equitable education for all students.
- To promote behavioral practices that will address the needs of a diverse community, through the following processes: Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), and Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP).
- To vigorously and assertively require systematic and quality general education intervention (Tier 1 & Tier 2) before we agree to an assessment. This includes a systematic review of the exclusionary criteria for SLD before the assessment is initiated to address racial and ethnic disparities in special education.
- To use assessment practices that identify underlying trauma that impacts the students' academic and social-emotional development.
- To advocate for trauma-based services to address behavioral issues instead of using exclusionary discipline practices.
- To partner with parents, families, and the community to support social justice, equity, and inclusive practices.
- To support students, particularly those with disabilities, to self-advocate for social justice and equity of instruction.
- To critically evaluate alternative educational placement for disproportionality and initiate corrective actions through partnership with educational leadership.
- To participate in ongoing reflection activities to identify implicit bias and actions that will ensure that students and families are not adversely affected.
- To participate in professional learning that will increase empathy, knowledge, and skills about diversity of cultures and exclusionary practice.
- To promote and participate in the recruitment of leadership and teachers that reflect the diverse community they serve.



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- To seek a leadership position that will impact both staff and policies for ending systemic racism and promoting equity for all students.

ENDNOTES

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RESOURCES

- Intersectionality and School Psychology: Implications for Practice
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/intersectionality-and-school-psychology-implications-for-practice>
- Implicit Bias: A Foundation for School Psychologists
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/implicit-bias-a-foundation-for-school-psychologists>
- <https://courageousconversation.com/> offers many resources for ending the race gap in education and reducing bias in schools.
- The classic book on prejudice in schools *Why are the All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* takes on big questions of diversity, equity and bridging divisions.
- 2020-2021 National Book Read, Just Medicine: A Cure for Racial Inequality in American Healthcare by Dayna Matthew, PhD. <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/national-book-read-just-medicine-a-cure-for-racial-inequality-in-american-healthcare-by-dr-dayna-matthew>

Acknowledgement of position statement writing team members: Gina Gordon-Lopez, M.A.Ed, LEP (Writing Team Chair); Richard Kleindienst, PhD, LEP; Seble B. Gebremedhin, MA, MS, LEP; LaShante Smith, EdS, LEP; James Hiramoto, PhD.

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