Position Statement

Racism, Prejudice, and Discrimination

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is committed to advocating for the rights, well-being, and educational and mental health needs of all students. These positive outcomes for children and youth are only possible in a society that guarantees equitable treatment to all people, including children and youth. NASP firmly believes that regardless of race, all students are entitled to an education that affirms and validates their cultural identity and nourishes their resilience.

NASP believes that racism, prejudice, and discrimination harm all children and youth, and have a profoundly negative effect on school achievement, self-efficacy, and social–emotional growth. Poor student outcomes for all historically marginalized groups ultimately damage the well-being of our nation because of the long-term implications of educational success for adult employment, civic engagement, and health (Hernandez, 2008).

NASP is committed to ensuring that all children receive an appropriate education. In accordance with NASP's (2010a) *Standards for Ethical and Professional Practices for School Psychologists* (I.3.4), school psychologists should continually engage in critical self-reflection to identify personal biases. They should become familiar with the varying sociocultural histories and experiences of students, affirming diversity and difference, while continually examining assumptions of power and privilege. Additionally, school psychologists should advocate for structures that support equitable access and participation in educational opportunities for members of different groups (Sullivan & A'Vant, 2009).

DEFINING FEATURES OF RACISM

Racism is the overarching societal paradigm that tolerates, accepts, and reinforces racial inequalities, and is associated with racially unequal opportunities for children to learn and thrive. Racial inequalities result in the discriminatory treatment of people of minority status. For instance, individuals from historically marginalized racial groups may be perceived as less worthy or less intelligent than those from the majority culture. At the same time, children or communities from the majority culture are allowed to maintain their established privileged and valued status. This privilege can result in better treatment and opportunities than are afforded to others within educational systems and other social institutions. The presence of racism in educational settings harms everyone, but has the most negative and lasting impact on racial minority groups (Pollock, 2008).

Racial Prejudice is a group attitude or orientation about the position of different racial groups within the social order (Bobo, 1999). These attitudes can be adopted by majority and minority groups.

Racial Discrimination includes direct or indirect, overt or subtle action(s) by the majority group that limit the economic, political, educational, and social opportunities of a minority group. Negative cultural stereotypes about specific races have resulted in discriminatory practices with a devastating impact on the academic achievement of children of color (Bobo & Fox, 2003).

CONSEQUENCES OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Students and families who endure racism experience negative mental health, academic, and social outcomes. Ethnic discrimination from adults and peers in educational settings is associated with increased negative perceptions of one's ethnic group (Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009). Youth who report experiencing prejudice are less likely to feel that opportunities are equal for anyone willing to work hard (Flanagan, Syvertsen, Gill, Gallay, & Cumsille, 2009).

Discrimination stress is positively associated with depression (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). Davis, Aronson, and Salinas (2006) noted that stereotypes become self-fulfilling prophecies resulting in lower academic achievement and negative outcomes. Over four decades of research has documented that students of color, specifically African American males, are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline consequences, such as suspension and expulsion, despite not engaging in more severe behaviors than their White counterparts to warrant such consequences (McKinney, Bartholomew, & Gray, 2010). Such discipline in turn is associated with student dropout and entry into the prison system (Wald & Losen, 2003). In the same vein, long-standing research findings have documented disproportionality in special education placements of students of color, and subsequently less time in general educational environments (Sullivan, A'Vant, Baker, et al., 2009). In general, educational disparities (e.g., special education and discipline referrals; achievement in math, science, and reading; graduation and dropout/push-out rates; test scores) are clearly linked to minority/majority status and contribute to large-scale achievement gaps.

Students subjected to racism, prejudice, and discrimination are more resilient when they experience high expectations; have firm support from parents, school, and community; and have a strong sense of ethnic identity (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006). To support student resiliency, a social justice lens should be incorporated into all educational environments. School psychologists should serve as change agents by promoting and encouraging social justice efforts in the support of academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. Not only must school psychologists endorse, advocate, and engage in culturally competent practices, they should advocate at the school, district, state, and national levels for more socially just organizations and policies (Shriberg et al., 2008). Working for social justice in the educational setting means guiding students and staff to reflect critically on their roles in proliferating racism and discrimination and supporting systemic change to prevent ongoing inequities. Proclamations of support without a foundation of action undermine the work of social justice, rendering it meaningless.

Racism, and its damaging results on students of minority status, poses a great responsibility for school psychologists to serve as advocates who promote equity and social justice. NASP urges all educators to work collaboratively with the students, families, and community leaders they serve in the following ways:

- Develop policies to establish and maintain racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity among school personnel;
- Develop pedagogical approaches to incorporate social justice at the classroom, school, and district levels;
- Implement research-based programs that reduce racial achievement gaps;
- Implement research-based strategies that mitigate the effects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination and result in resilience and educational excellence;

- Promote active parent and community education and involvement in positive student outcomes;
- Promote ongoing evaluation of institutional policies that may passively support negative outcomes for certain groups of students.

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

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, disability, or educational need. This commitment is demonstrated through a diverse range of professional services and responsibilities. School psychologists are charged with advocating for culturally competent, evidence-based practice and assisting schools with reforming policies and practices that contribute to inequitable outcomes (NASP, 2009). Further, NASP's standards (NASP, 2010a, 2010b) call for school psychologists to promote fairness and justice by cultivating safe, welcoming, inclusive school environments. Specifically, school psychologists should:

- Ensure their knowledge, skills, and professional practices reflect understanding and respect for human diversity and promote effective services, advocacy, and social justice for all children;
- Ensure their practices are grounded in an evidence-based framework that integrates (a) the best available research evidence and (b) thorough knowledge of how diversity factors may influence child development, behavior, and school learning;
- Learn about the different groups represented in the school community and use knowledge of this diversity to facilitate the services provided in and out of school;
- Understand how dimensions of difference influence learning and behavior of students, families, teachers, and oneself;
- Engage in critical reflection to identify one's own biases and ensure that these biases do not negatively affect students and families;
- Encourage such critical reflection in others;
- Consult with families, community members, teachers, and staff to understand more clearly student and population needs;
- Work to establish positive, productive relationships with students, families, and colleagues from all backgrounds;
- Seek supervision or consultation when dealing with unfamiliar clients or situations, or when facing circumstances that otherwise challenge one's multicultural competence or nondiscriminatory practice skills;
- Provide and seek out effective and ongoing professional development regarding evidence-based practice, cultural competence, and self-reflection;
- Assist administrators in evaluating current practices, policies, and procedures (e.g., discipline, intervention, referral) to determine overall effectiveness and any potential disparities in access, participation, or outcomes among students from different groups;
- Promote systems change and equitable alternatives when ineffective or inequitable policies, practices, or procedures are suspected or identified by school data.

School psychologists strive to ensure that all children have equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from school programs. All students and families must have access to and can benefit from 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, including race, ethnicity, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, immigration status, socioeconomic

status, primary language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, or any other distinguishing characteristic (NASP, 2010a).

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