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School Counselors Addressing Racism and Bias

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School Counselors Addressing Racism and Bias

In December 2021, the American School Counselor Association distributed a survey about racism and bias in schools to a random sample of 6,000 ASCA members. The survey was designed to gather details on school counselors' and schools' practices in supporting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and addressing racism and bias. The data reveals that many schools lack DEI curricula/programs (45%) and that, even when programs do exist, little headway is being made in addressing disproportionalities and improving students' understanding of racism and bias.

Respondents report that programs and resources are typically developed by both administrators (49%, district; 37%, school-level) and school counselors (44%). The work of implementing programs is also shared among administrators (54%) and school counselors (54%), although teachers also share in this work. For most respondents, their role in addressing racism and bias consists of individual counseling (68%) and classroom lessons (51%). Comments from respondents point to a lack of training outside of multicultural counseling, insufficient availability of programs and curricula, and frustration with a lack of support for anti-racism and DEI efforts. However, respondents report that when DEI and anti-racism efforts are in place in their schools, positive outcomes occur, including improved school climate (41%).

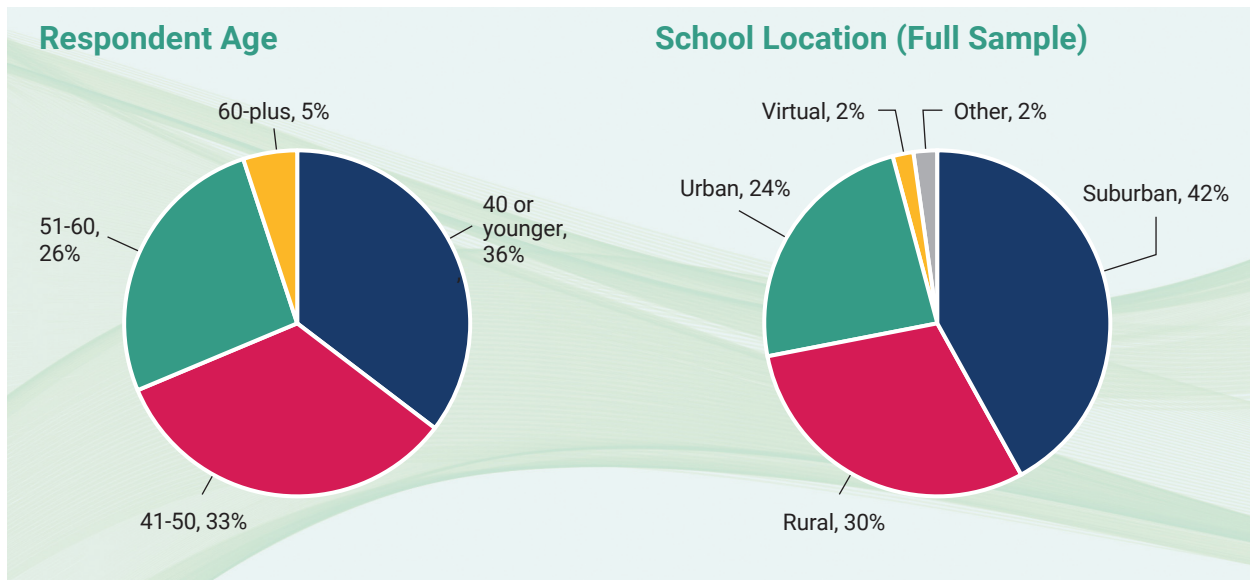
Methodology

The research was conducted via an electronic survey using the Qualtrics platform. An email invitation with a unique link to the survey site was sent to 6,000 ASCA members and yielded 462 responses, for an overall response rate of 7.7%. The statistical universe measured in the survey is derived from a universe of approximately 42,000 ASCA members. Responses were calculated at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 4.5, which is within the acceptable range of +/-5.

Respondent Demographics

Nearly nine in 10 respondents to this survey are school counselors (88%), while 5% are school counseling directors, coordinators or supervisors at the district level and 4% at the building level. Another 1% are administrators.

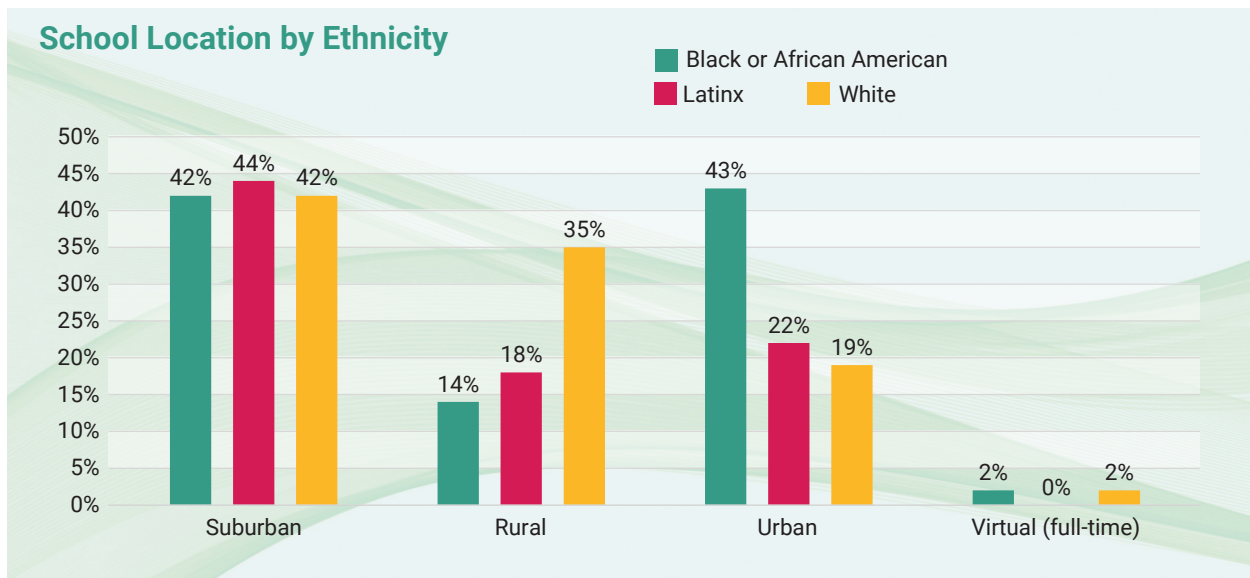
The largest percentage of respondents are white (71%), 14% are Black or African American, 4% are Latinx, 3% are two or more races, 2% are Asian, 1% are American Indian or Alaska Native and less than 1% are Pacific islanders. Five percent prefer not to say. In terms of respondent age, 36% are 40 or younger, 33% are 41-50, 26% are 51-60 and 5% are 60-plus. The overwhelming majority are female (86%), 12% are male, 1% are nonbinary/third gender and 2% prefer not to say. Further, 89% are heterosexual or straight, 4% are gay or lesbian, 3% are bisexual, 1% indicate a different identity and 4% prefer not to say.



The highest level of education for 83% of respondents is a master’s degree; 5%, education specialist; and 6%, doctorate degree (2% in school counseling or school counseling supervision and training and 4% in another discipline).

Respondents mostly work at public, noncharter schools (76%), followed by 9% who work at private/independent/parochial schools and 2% virtual-only schools. Other percentages are at public charter (4%) or in districts that are combination public charter/noncharter schools (9%).

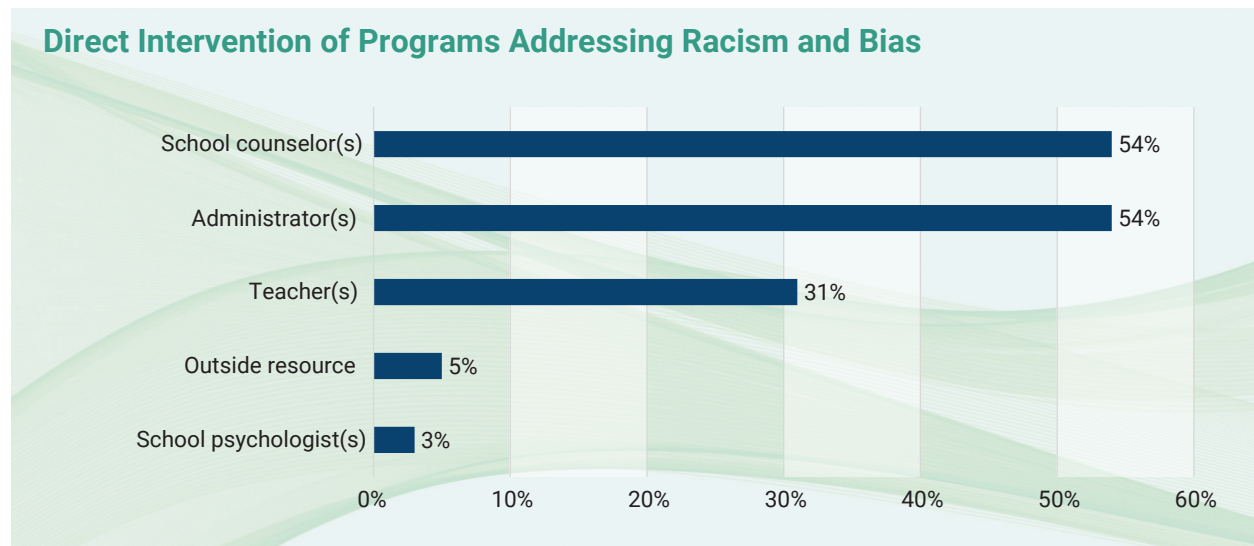
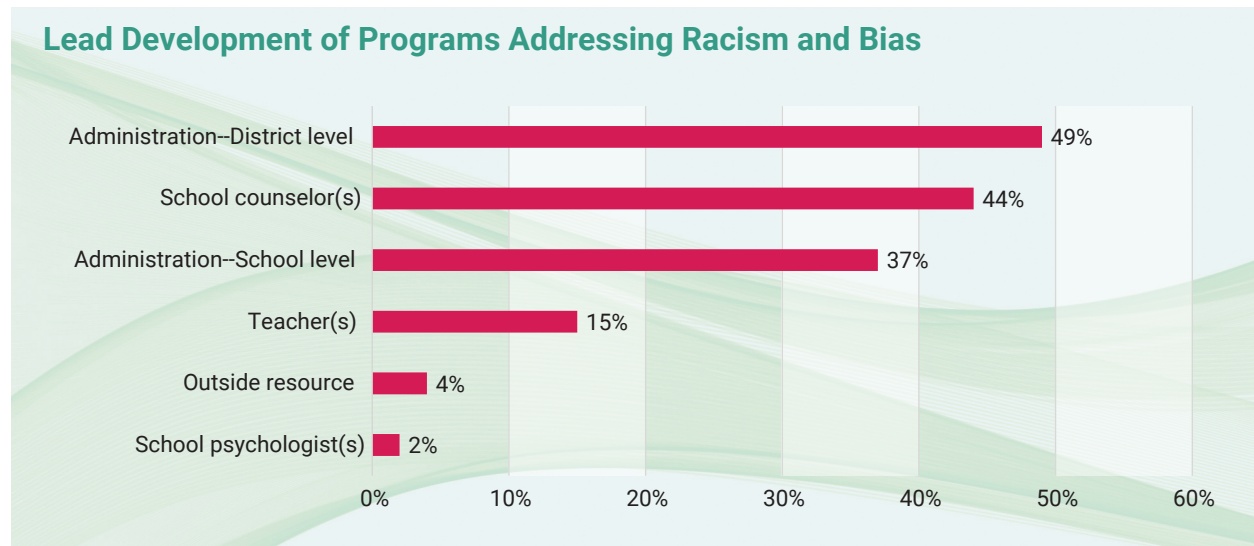
In terms of school location, responses are mixed, with 42% in suburban schools, 30% in rural schools and 24% in urban schools. These responses vary based on respondent ethnicity.



Programs Addressing Racism and Bias

Nearly half of respondents indicate district-level administrators are primarily responsible for leading the development of programs and resources that address racism and bias in their school (49%), while 44% say school counselors lead the development of programs and 37% of school-level administrators lead programs. Another 15% indicate teachers develop programs, 4% point to outside resources (DEI committees, consultants, etc.) and 2% school psychologists.

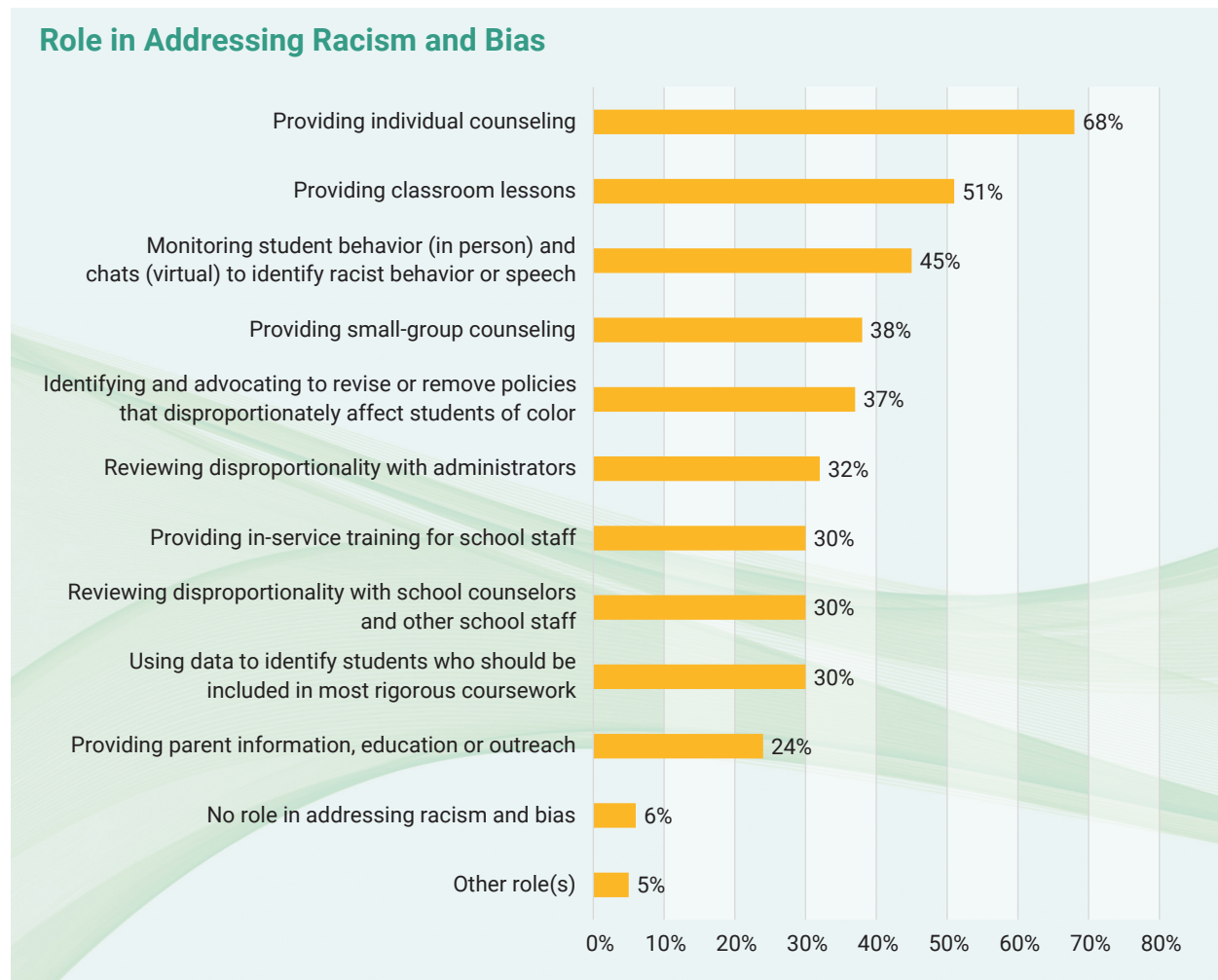
In terms of direct intervention of programs, 54% of respondents say school counselors directly lead programs addressing racism and bias in their schools, as well as 54%, administrators; 31%, teachers; and 3%, school psychologists.



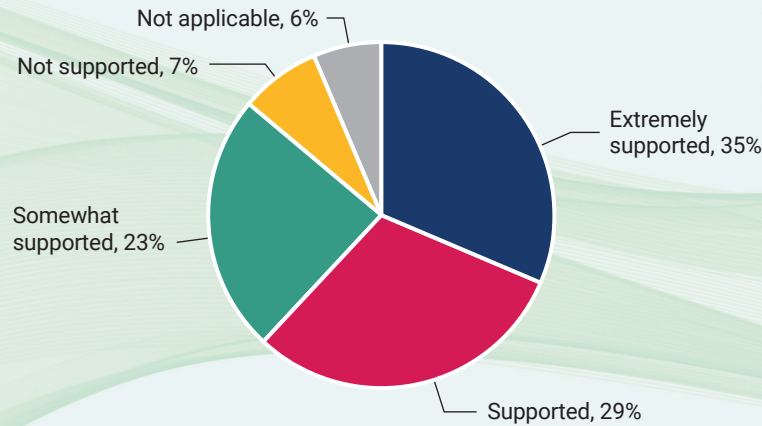
Respondents were also asked if their school/district has a system set up for students, parents and community members to report hate and bias incidents in their school/district. Although 62% say their schools do have such a system, such as hotlines or apps, 38% have no system for reporting incidents. White respondents (63%) are more likely to indicate their school has a system in place vs. Latinx (50%) or Black (52%) respondents.

Role in Addressing Racism and Bias

In addressing racism and bias in their schools, the majority of respondents (68%) say they provide individual counseling, and about half (51%) provide classroom lessons. Additionally 45% monitor student behavior and chats to identify racist behavior or speech, 38% provide small-group counseling, 37% identify and advocate to revise or remove policies that disproportionately affect students of color, 32% review disproportionality with administrators, and 30% each provide in-service training for school staff, review disproportionality with school counselors and other school staff, and use data to identify students who should be included in the most rigorous coursework. About one-quarter provide parent information, education or outreach, and 6% have no role in addressing racism and bias.



Level of Support from Administrators/Leadership in Efforts to Address Racism and Bias

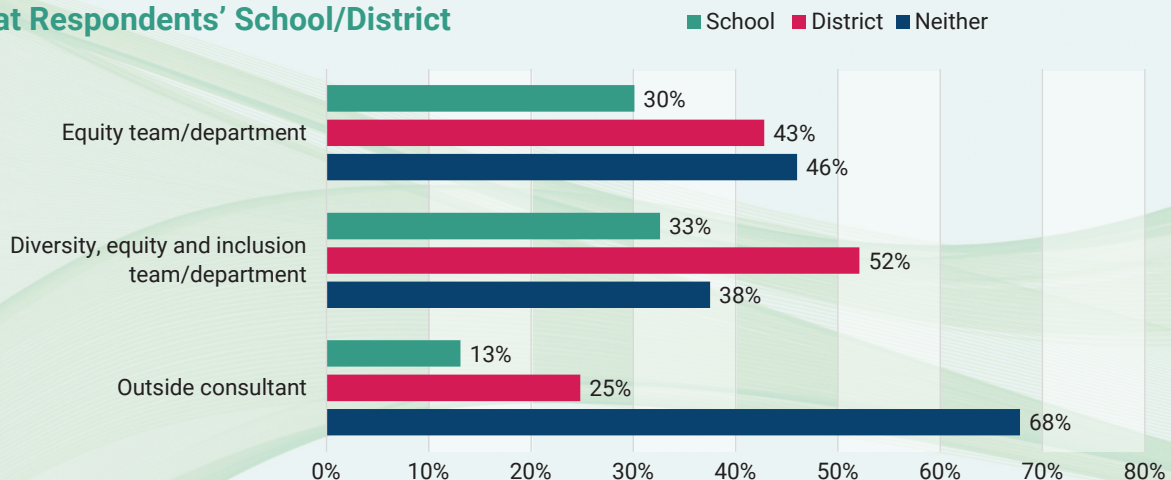


Overall, about two-thirds of respondents say they are extremely supported/supported by their administration in addressing racism and bias at school. However, this varies somewhat by demographic group, with Latinx respondents feeling less supported (50% extremely supported/supported). Among all respondents, 23% say they feel somewhat supported, 7% are not supported and 6% say not applicable.

DEI Teams and Programs

About half of respondents say their school district has a DEI team or department, while just one-third have a team/department at their school. About 43% indicate their district has an equity team or department, while 30% of schools have one. One-quarter of respondents' districts use an outside consultant at the district level and 13% at the school level. However, 38% of respondents do not have a DEI team, 46% lack an equity team and 68% do not have an outside consultant.

DEI and Equity Teams/Departments at Respondents' School/District



In terms of DEI curriculum/resources, 45% of respondents say they do not have these resources, 28% say they're developed by the district, 20% by teacher or school counselor, 18% by the school and 10% provided by another source, although many of the "other" comments are notations that they are not aware of a program or that one is in development.

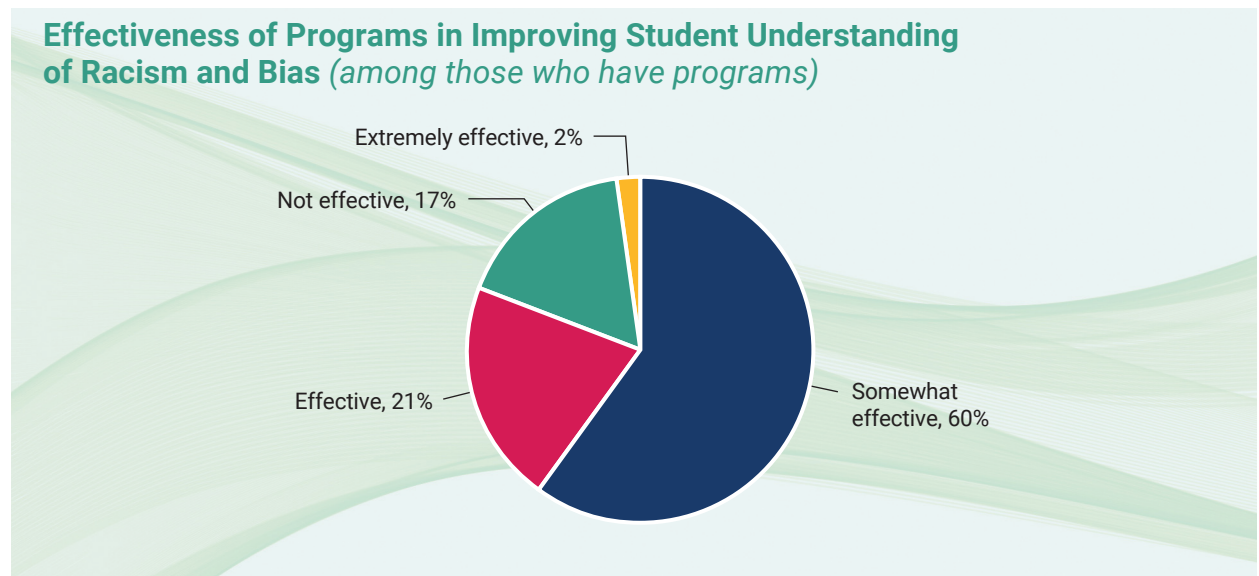
Asked about specific resources/programs, respondents point to several social/emotional learning platforms, such as Second Step, QuaverEd or Sanford Harmony, or training programs or books such as the ASCA U DEI Specialist training or ASCA's "Culturally Sustaining School Counseling" book. Respondents point to many barriers or challenges they face in implementing programs, including administrators who are fearful

Respondents face numerous barriers to implementing programs addressing racism and bias, including fear of parent/community pushback, behavioral needs taking precedence, failure to acknowledge the issue and other factors.

of parent/community pushback, behavioral needs taking precedence, limited staff resources, failure to acknowledge the issue, lack of staff diversity and lack of a curriculum/resources, among other issues.

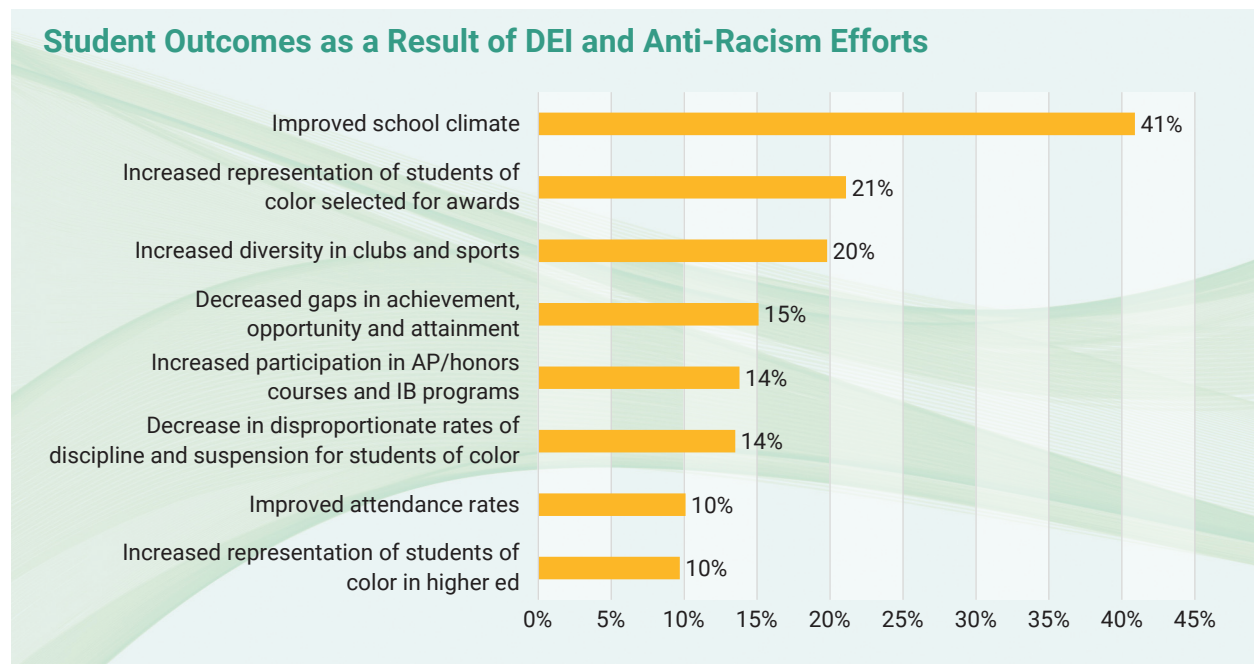
Effectiveness of Programs

Unfortunately, respondents report that DEI or anti-racism/bias programs are largely only somewhat effective in improving students' understanding of racism and bias. Overall, only 14% of respondents consider programs extremely effective/effective. However, 38% say they have no programs or curriculum for students. Among only those respondents who do have programs in place, 23% consider them extremely effective/effective in improving student understanding of racism and bias, and 60% find them somewhat effective. Findings vary somewhat by demographic group.



Respondents have observed some positive student outcomes as a result of DEI and anti-racism efforts in their schools, including improved school climate (41%), increased representation of students of color selected for awards and recognition (21%) and increased diversity in clubs and sports (20%). Smaller percentages have observed decreased gaps in achievement, opportunity and attainment (15%); increased participation in AP/honors courses and IB programs (14%); decrease in disproportionate rates of discipline and suspension for students of color (14%); improved attendance rates (10%); and increased representation of students of color participating in higher education (10%).

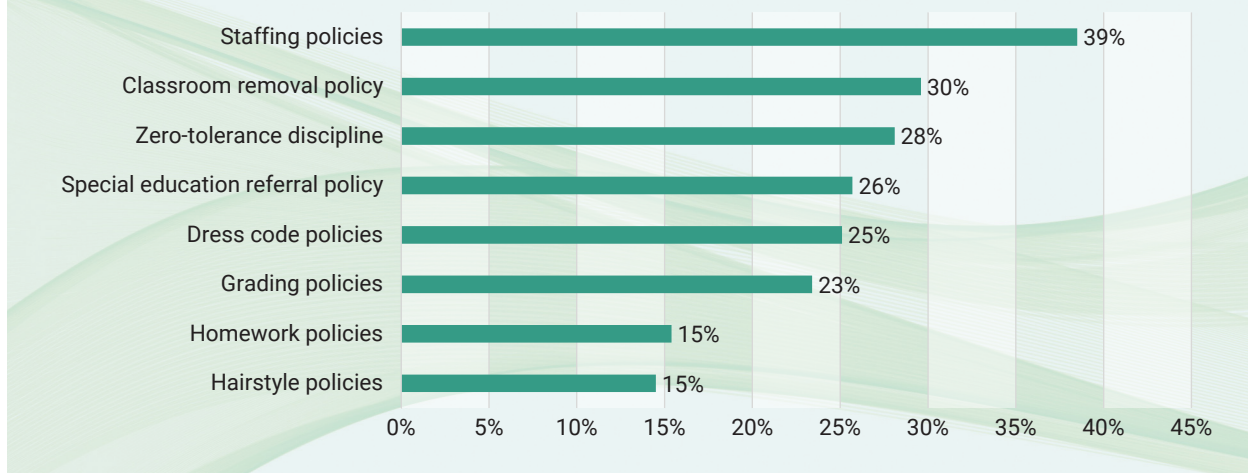
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Inequitable Practices

Respondents have identified a number of policies that disproportionately affect students of color in their school or district, including staffing policies (e.g., perpetuating the hiring of educators and school leaders with unaddressed bias) (39%), classroom removal policies (30%), zero-tolerance discipline (e.g., classroom to justice system) (28%), special education referral policies (26%), dress code policies (25%), grading policies (23%), homework policies (15%) and hairstyle policies (15%).

Practices that Disproportionately Affect Students of Color



Respondents have used a number of practices to counter these disproportionalities, such as talking with staff about how homework expectations affect students in different ways; adjusting dress codes; advocating for students when they experience discrimination and/or racism from teachers; reviewing policies with a more critical lens; using equity reflective circles and unconscious bias training; and offering mentoring programs, conflict mediation and restorative practices.

Training Experience and Needs

During their school counselor preparation program, nearly nine in 10 respondents (87%) received training in multicultural competency, yet smaller portions were trained in other areas, including school counseling to address opportunity gaps (47%), leadership to create systemic change (32%), instruction on recognizing signs of racism and bias (30%), history of the American education system (25%) and strategies to provide counseling to student victims of racism and bias (24%). Eight percent say they received no racism and bias training in their preparation program.

Training Received in Preparation Program



Respondents indicate they would have appreciated training in actionable strategies to help reduce racism and bias, history of bias and microaggressions, how to challenge or address school leadership and more.

A number of respondents commented regarding DEI training or professional development offered to staff. Several indicated they have received in-service training, have attended state school counselor association conferences focused on DEI, participated in training sessions with consultants or guest speakers, provided articles to read or videos to watch, and other professional development. Several also indicated they have received no training and/or have sought training on their own.

Asked to provide additional feedback about addressing racism and bias, some respondents expressed frustration with lack of efforts to address issues in their schools or district, fears regarding political pressure and parent pushback, and lack of curriculum or resources.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that school counselors, administrators and other school staff are working to address racism and bias in schools and districts. The finding that 41% of respondents observed improved school climate as a result of DEI and anti-racism efforts is encouraging, as is the finding that two-thirds of respondents are extremely supported or supported by administrators in this work. However, these efforts are incremental, with 38% of respondents reporting no programs and curriculum for students. Additionally, many respondents noted concerns regarding resistance from parents and local communities that prevent effective deployment of targeted programs both to educate students about racism and bias and to address disproportionalities. Further research is needed to identify what programs are most effective, including what best resonates with students and what efforts are most effective in addressing systemic inequities.

About the American School Counselor Association

The American School Counselor Association is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) professional organization based in Alexandria, Va. ASCA promotes student success by expanding the image and influence of school counseling through leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. ASCA helps school counselors guide their students toward academic achievement, career planning and social/emotional development to help today's students become tomorrow's productive, contributing members of society. Founded in 1952, ASCA has a network of 51 state and territory associations and a membership of more than 42,000 school counseling professionals. For additional information on the American School Counselor Association, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.