

Eliminating Racism and Bias in Schools: The School Counselor's Role

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd as well as countless other black Americans have tragically shown the racial divisions that persist in the U.S. The systemic and institutional racism underlying violence toward black people and relegating them to generations of poverty permeates every facet of American society, including the educational system. Progress has been made in many school districts, but there is still much work to be done.

All educators have an obligation to end racism and bias. School counselors have a unique opportunity to be an important part of the solution. Through implementation of a school counseling program, school counselors promote equity and access for all students and make a significant impact on creating a school culture free from racism and bias.

School counselors have specific training to recognize signs of racism and bias that harm students and impede our nation from reaching its potential, including:

- gaps in achievement, opportunity and attainment
- disproportionate rates of discipline and suspension for students of color
- lower attendance rates
- self-destructive behavior such as:
 - acting out
 - withdrawal
 - nonparticipation in class activities
- gatekeeping of underrepresented students in access to and placement in rigorous curriculum such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate
- lower participation of underrepresented groups participating in higher education

How Can School Counselors Address Racism and Bias through a School Counseling Program?

These components from the Deliver chapter of the ASCA National Model (pp. 77–84) articulate the school counselor role.

Direct Student Services

Instruction

Deliver lessons in classroom, small-group or individual settings that teach the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success. Lessons could include topics that help students:

- Create a sense of belonging in the school environment for all students
- Recognize and respond to racism and bias
- Demonstrate empathy for students different from themselves
- Learn skills to create positive relationships with students different from themselves
- Learn appropriate communication skills
- Create positive and supportive relationships with other students and adults
- Feel comfortable to identify or share problems with adults who support success
- Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self when experiencing or witnessing racism or bias
- Understand their own unconscious bias
- Navigate systems of oppression and injustice
- Enhance their cultural competence and facilitate cultural awareness

Appraisal and Advisement

Use valid and reliable assessment instruments with concerns for cultural sensitivity and bias to help students analyze their abilities, interests, skills and achievement. Make recommendations to students based on the appraisal of these instruments that inspire students to realize their maximum potential.

Counseling

Provide assistance and support to student victims of racism and bias in individual or small- group settings by helping them:

- Process the incidents of racism and bias
- Recognize the racist/biased behavior was not their fault
- Learn advocacy strategies to respond to racism and bias when it occurs
- Identify adults in the building who can help them if they are experiencing racism or bias

Provide assistance, support, education and guidance to perpetrators of racism and bias in individual settings by helping them:

- Understand and identify the problem behavior

- Demonstrate empathy for students different from themselves
- Learn skills to create positive relationships with students different from themselves
- Learn appropriate communication skills
- Identify ways to repair the harm caused by the racist or biased behavior

Indirect Student Services

Consultation

Share strategies to address and end racism and bias in schools with families, educators and community organizations to support student achievement and success. Encourage families and educators to support and align with lessons and activities designed to combat racism and bias.

Seek information to learn more about where racism and bias exist in schools and to identify strategies to end racist and biased behaviors.

Collaboration

Work to end racism and bias through collaboration such as:

- Teaming and partnering with families, educators, businesses and community organizations focused on anti-racism/bias
- Serving on school/district committees focused on anti-racism/bias
- Presenting workshops for parents on how to support and encourage appropriate student behaviors
- Creating community partnerships focused on anti-racism/bias
- Working with administrators, families and community members to organize immediate and follow-up interventions in response to a crisis

Referrals

When student needs extend beyond short-term services or counseling, refer victims of racism and bias to school or community resources that support victim rights and heal the damage. Refer perpetrators of racism to school or community resources that address racism and bias and teach appropriate anti-racist and anti-bias behaviors.

Reporting

Report to parents/guardians, administration and/or appropriate authorities when students disclose a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their or other students' physical or mental well-being. Follow applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.

Creating Systemic Change

- Identify sources of power and authority and formal and informal leadership
- Collect and report data that exposes inequitable outcomes such as:
 - Gaps in achievement, opportunity and attainment
 - Disproportionate rates of discipline and suspension for students of color
 - Lower attendance rates
 - Underrepresentation of students of color in rigorous curriculum such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate
 - Lower participation of underrepresented groups participating in higher education
- Plan for and collect results data for classroom/group Mindsets & Behaviors action plans and closing-the-gap action plans such as:
 - Mindsets & Behaviors: Students can demonstrate three ways to advocate for a student who has been wronged by bias.
- Outcome:
 - Achievement – The percentage of students of color earning an A or B in AP English will increase by 10%.
 - Attendance – Fifth-grade students of color will have an attendance rate of 97% or higher each quarter of this school year.
 - Discipline: Suspension rates of eighth-grade students of color will decrease by 15% by the end of the year.
- Lead efforts to challenge policies, procedures, traditions or customs that perpetuate intentional or unintentional racist and biased behaviors and outcomes.
- Advocate for policies and procedures that dismantle racism and bias and that promote equity for all.
- Collaborate with families, educators, businesses and community organizations focused on ending racism and bias.
- Challenge biased comments or behaviors if they occur in school/district committees

What ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors Standards Apply to Issues of Racism and Bias?

School counselors teach the [ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors](#) standards to promote academic achievement, college and career readiness and social/emotional learning, which have the long-term effect of preventing and overcoming racism and bias.

Helping student victims of racism and bias develop these mindsets prepares them for success and helps them escape the oppression of racism. Demonstrating these standards is also essential for students who witness racism and bias or who have never been victims of racism and bias, as these Mindsets & Behaviors are critical to breaking the cycle of oppression and eliminating racism and bias from the fabric of our country.

Applicable ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards include:

Category 1: Mindsets Standards

School counselors encourage the following mindsets for all students.

M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being

M 2. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

M 3. Sense of belonging in the school environment

Category 2: Behaviors Standards

Students will demonstrate the following standards through classroom lessons, activities and/or individual/small-group counseling.

B-SMS 5. Demonstrate perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals

B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem

B-SMS 9. Demonstrate personal safety skills

B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities

B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills

B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students

B-SS 3. Create relationships with adults that support success

B-SS 4. Demonstrate empathy

B-SS 5. Demonstrate ethical decision-making and social responsibility

B-SS 6. Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills

B-SS 7. Use leadership and teamwork skills to work effectively in diverse teams

B-SS 8. Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self, when necessary

B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

What ASCA Ethical Standards Apply to Issues Related to Racism and Bias?

School counselors help identify and address racism and bias while working within the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#).

Preamble

All students have the right to:

- Be respected, be treated with dignity and have access to a school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations including but not limited to: ethnic/racial identity, nationality, age, social class, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, emancipated minors, wards of the state, homeless youth and incarcerated youth. School counselors as social-justice advocates support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and consult when their competence level requires additional support.
- Receive the information and support needed to move toward self-determination, self-development and affirmation within one's group identities. Special care is given to improve overall educational outcomes for students who have been historically underserved in educational services.

Applicable ASCA Ethical Standards include:

A. RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS

A.1. Supporting Student Development

School counselors:

- a. Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.
- e. Are concerned with students' academic, career and social/emotional needs and encourage each student's maximum development.
- f. Respect students' and families' values, beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identification/expression and cultural background and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity.
- g. Are knowledgeable of laws, regulations and policies affecting students and families and strive to protect and inform students and families regarding their rights.
- h. Provide effective, responsive interventions to address student needs.
- i. Consider the involvement of support networks, wraparound services and educational teams needed to best serve students.

A.2. Confidentiality

School counselors:

- d. Explain the limits of confidentiality in developmentally appropriate terms through multiple methods such as student handbooks, school counselor department websites, school counseling brochures, classroom curriculum and/or verbal notification to individual students.
- e. Keep information confidential unless legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed or a breach is required to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student. Serious and foreseeable harm is different for each minor in schools and is determined by students' developmental and chronological age, the setting, parental rights and the nature of the harm. School counselors consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt as to the validity of an exception.

A.3. Comprehensive Data-Informed Program

School counselors:

- b. Provide students with a comprehensive school counseling program that ensures equitable academic, career and social/emotional development opportunities for all students.
- 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, socioeconomic status and/or other relevant classifications.
- d. Use data to determine needed interventions, which are then delivered to help close the information, attainment, achievement and opportunity gaps.

A.4. Academic, Career and Social/Emotional Plans

School counselors:

- c. Identify gaps in college and career access and the implications of such data for addressing both intentional and unintentional biases related to college and career counseling.
- d. Provide opportunities for all students to develop the mindsets and behaviors necessary to learn work-related skills, resilience, perseverance, and understanding of lifelong learning as a part of long-term career success, a positive attitude toward learning and a strong work ethic.

A.9. Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others

School counselors:

a. Inform parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when a student poses a serious and foreseeable risk of harm to self or others. When feasible, this is to be done after careful deliberation and consultation with other appropriate professionals. School counselors inform students of the school counselor's legal and ethical obligations to report the concern to the appropriate authorities unless it is appropriate to withhold this information to protect the student (e.g. student might run away if he/she knows parents are being called). The consequence of the risk of not giving parents/guardians a chance to intervene on behalf of their child is too great. Even if the danger appears relatively remote, parents should be notified

A.10. Underserved and At-Risk Populations

School counselors:

a. Strive to contribute to a safe, respectful, nondiscriminatory school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect and civility.

A.13. Evaluation, Assessment and Interpretation

School counselors:

a. Use only valid and reliable tests and assessments with concern for bias and cultural sensitivity.

i. Conduct school counseling program assessments to determine the effectiveness of activities supporting students' academic, career and social/emotional development through accountability measures, especially examining efforts to close information, opportunity and attainment gaps.

A.14. Technical and Digital Citizenship

School counselors:

f. Advocate for equal access to technology for all students.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES TO PARENTS/ GUARDIANS, SCHOOL AND SELF

B.1. Responsibilities to Parents/Guardians

School counselors:

d. Are culturally competent and sensitive to diversity among families. Recognize that all parents/guardians, custodial and noncustodial, are vested with certain rights and responsibilities for their children's welfare by virtue of their role and according to law.

B.2. Responsibilities to the School

School counselors:

m. Promote cultural competence to help create a safer more inclusive school environment.

o. Promote equity and access for all students through the use of community resources.

p. Use culturally inclusive language in all forms of communication.

B.3. Responsibilities to Self

School counselors:

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.

j. Refrain from refusing services to students based solely on the school counselor's personally held beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity. School counselors respect the diversity of students and seek training and supervision when prejudice or biases interfere with providing comprehensive services to all students.

k. Work toward a school climate that embraces diversity and promotes academic, career and social/emotional development for all students.

D. SCHOOL COUNSELING INTERN SITE SUPERVISORS

Field/intern site supervisors:

d. Are culturally competent and consider cultural factors that may have an impact on the supervisory relationship.

What ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies Apply to Issues Related to Racism and Bias?

School counselors help identify and address racism and bias while working within the [ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies for School Counselors](#).

Mindsets

School counselors believe:

M 1. Every student can learn, and every student can succeed.

M 2. Every student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.

M 3. Every student should graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary opportunities.

M 4. Every student should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program

M 7. Comprehensive school counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career and social/emotional outcomes.

Behaviors

School counselors demonstrate the following standards in the design, implementation and assessment of a comprehensive school counseling program

B-PF 2 a. Explain the organizational structure and governance of the American educational system as well as cultural, political and social influences on current educational practices

c. Explain and/or inform the process for development of policy and procedures at the building, district, state and national levels

B-PF 3a. Practice within the ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors

B-PF 6a. Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect of differences in customs, communications, traditions, values and other traits among students based on race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or intellectual ability and other factors

b. Explain how students' cultural, social and economic background may affect their academic achievement, behavior, relationships and overall performance in school

c. Maintain and communicate high expectations for every student, regardless of cultural, social or economic background

d. Explain the dynamics of cross-cultural communications and demonstrate the ability to communicate with persons of other cultures effectively

e. Collaborate with administrators, teachers and other staff in the school and district to ensure culturally responsive curricula and student-centered instruction

f. Understand personal limitations and biases, and articulate how they may affect the school counselor's work

B-PF 7 a. Identify sources of power and authority and formal and informal leadership

h. Serve as a leader in the school and community to promote and support student success

B-PF 9 a. Act as a systems change agent to create an environment promoting and supporting student success

b. Use data to identify how school, district and state educational policies, procedures and practices support and/or impede student success

c. Use data to demonstrate a need for systemic change in areas such as course enrollment patterns; equity and access; and achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps

d. Develop and implement a plan to address personal and/or institutional resistance to change that better supports student success

B-SS 6 a. Partner with others to advocate for student achievement and educational equity and opportunities

B-PA 2 a. Collect and analyze data to identify areas of success or gaps between and among different groups of students in achievement, attendance, discipline and opportunities

b. Review, disaggregate and interpret student achievement, attendance and discipline data to identify and implement interventions as needed

c. Create goals based on student, school and/or district data to close the achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps

What ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs (ASCA CAEP SPA) Apply to Issues Related to Racism and Bias?

School counselor education programs prepare school counselors-in-training to identify and address racism and bias. Training to implement a school counseling program includes an emphasis on advocacy, social justice, multiculturalism and preparation to work with a diverse population.

Applicable standards from the [ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs](#) include:

Standard 1. Foundational Knowledge

1.1 Describe the organizational structure, governance, and evolution of the American education system as well as cultural, political, and social influences on current educational practices and on individual and collective learning environments.

1.2 Describe the evolution of the school counseling profession, the basis for a comprehensive school counseling program, and the school counselor's role in supporting growth and learning for all students.

1.3 Describe aspects of human development, such as cognitive, language, social/emotional, and physical development, as well as the impact of environmental stressors and societal inequities on learning and life outcomes.

Standard 2. Core Theories and Concepts

2.1 Describe established and emerging counseling and educational methods, including but not limited to childhood and adolescent development, learning theories, behavior modification and classroom management, social justice, multiculturalism, group counseling, college/career readiness, and crisis response.

2.2 Demonstrate strengths-based counseling and relationship-building skills to support student growth and promote equity and inclusion.

Standard 3. Instructional and School Counseling Interventions

3.1 Use multiple data points, including student interviews, direct observation, educational records, consultation with parents/families/staff, and test results to systematically identify student needs and collaboratively establish goals.

3.2 Identify research-based individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom instruction techniques to promote academic achievement, college/career readiness, and social/emotional development for every student.

Standard 4. Student Learning Outcomes

4.2 Collaborate with stakeholders such as families, teachers, support personnel, administrators, and community partners to create learning environments that promote educational equity, and support success and well-being for every student.

4.4 Demonstrate pedagogical skills, including culturally responsive classroom management strategies, lesson planning, and personalized instruction.

Standard 5. Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Comprehensive School Counseling Programs.

5.3 Use school-wide data to promote systemic change within the school so every student is prepared for post-secondary success.

Standard 6. Professional Practice

Candidates demonstrate the appropriate scope of school counseling practice in varied educational settings, understand their role as a leader, collaborator, advocate, and agent for systemic change, and engage in opportunities to support their professional growth and identity development.

6.2 Demonstrate leadership, advocacy and collaboration for the promotion of student learning and achievement, the school counseling program, and the profession.

Standard 7. Ethical Practice

Candidates demonstrate ethical and culturally responsive behavior, maintain the highest standard of professionalism and legal obligation, and use consultation and ongoing critical reflection to prevent ethical lapses.

7.1 Engage in professional behavior that reflects ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors and relevant federal and state laws and district policies.

7.2 Describe the impact of federal and state laws and regulations, as well as district policies, on schools, students, families, and school counseling practice.

7.3 Seek consultation and supervision to support ongoing critical reflection in an effort to identify cultural blind spots and prevent ethical lapses.

What ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselor Education Faculty Apply to Issues Related to Racism and Bias?

School counselor education programs help prepare school counselors in training to identify and address racism and bias while working within the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselor Education Faculty](#).

A. Content Knowledge

A-1. Are knowledgeable about, follow and teach the current version of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, the ASCA National Model, the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors and the ASCA position statements.

A-2. Have the knowledge and skills to support social justice and advocacy efforts and to teach graduate students to become culturally competent school counselors and leaders.

B. Andragogy and Educational Methodology

Faculty members who teach in school counselor education programs:

B-1. Promote the use of techniques supported by empirical research and appropriate for a diverse population (as defined by the preamble of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors). If instructors teach about developing techniques, they clarify the research base for the techniques and any potential risks related to the techniques.

B-2. Use a variety of teaching methods to support a diverse student body and provide reasonable accommodations to graduate students in accordance with university policy and state and federal laws.
B-4. Are committed to recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty and student body.

C. Career Preparation

Faculty members who teach in school counselor education programs:

C-1. Provide prospective graduate students with information about the school counseling profession, including program training components, professional values related to counseling a diverse population and current job market statistics for graduates.

F. School Counselor Curriculum

The curriculum for school counselor preparation programs:

F-4. Emphasizes social justice, advocacy, multiculturalism and preparation to work with a diverse population (as defined in the preamble to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors).

What Do School Staff Members, Parents and Students Need to Know About Systemic and Institutional Racism?

- Racism and biased behaviors exist in our schools – The education system has a long history of racism and bias. Progress has been made, but it has been slow, and there is much work to be done. Racism and biased behaviors occur among adults and students in the building.
- Impact of racism and bias – Educate school staff, parents and students about the impact of racist and biased behaviors that impede our nation from reaching its potential including:
 - Gaps in achievement, opportunity and attainment
 - Disproportionate rates of discipline and suspension for students of color
 - Lower attendance rates
 - Self-destructive behavior such as
 - acting out
 - withdrawal
 - nonparticipation in class activities
- Gatekeeping of underrepresented students in access to and placement in rigorous curriculum such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate
- Lower participation of underrepresented groups participating in higher education
- Where to go for help – Ensure school staff, parents and students know to which school staff they should report concerns about racist and biased policies, procedures and behaviors.
- School resources – Let school staff, parents and students know that administrators, school counselors and other school staff are always a resource to address student concerns and help their students achieve success.
- Community resources - Publicize community resources for additional assistance, including individuals and organizations with missions to end racism and bias.

Additional Resources

ASCA Resources

[The Role of the School Counselor](#)

ASCA Position Statements:

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

[The School Counselor and Cultural Diversity](#)

Magazine articles:

[Myth Busters](#)

[Will We Overcome](#)

Webinars:

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

[Ignite Change for Equity and Inclusion](#)

[Supporting Students After Crisis and Loss](#)

[Culturally Responsive Pedagogy](#)

[Cross-cultural Counseling: Understand Bias and Practice Humility](#)

[Build Multiculturally Aware Students](#)

Journal articles:

Race, Gender, Class and Achievement: A Culturally Responsive Approach to Urban School Counseling

An Examination of Referrals to the School Counselor by Race, Gender and Family Structure

Gender and Ethnic Bias in Letters of Recommendation: Considerations for School Counselors

Supporting Interethnic and Interracial Friendships among Youth to Reduce Prejudice and Racism in Schools: The Role of the School Counselor

Exploring the Work Experiences of School Counselors of Color

Transitioning to High School: Issues and Challenges for African American Students

Teaching School Counselors to Use Evidence-Based Practice to Advance Social Justice: A Case Study

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies: A Leadership Framework for Professional School Counseling

For additional resources, see www.schoolcounselor.org/anti-racism.