

# School Counseling Within the Context of Social Justice and Antiracism

*I can't breathe.*

—George Floyd

Questions regarding how to fix schools to be more equitable and “just” have become commonplace in education reform discussions. Systemic racism is evident in all aspects of schooling, from early childhood education options to college readiness and preparation. The racist ideas and beliefs inherent in school counseling programs impact students as well as schools and are often especially punishing for students of color who are also marginalized along other social identities, such as gender, ability, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation.

Counseling, as a profession, has recently attempted to address the question, “What should professional counselors do to address systemic and structural racism in schools?” The American Counseling Association (ACA) created a toolkit for being an antiracist advocate and put forth recommendations for dealing with racial trauma. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) put forth two position statements on cultural diversity and equity. And, in 2020, the ASCA created a Standard of Practice document to give more clarity regarding school counselors’ role in ending racism in schools. But what does an antiracist school counselor do

that is different from the traditional approach to school counseling? And, better yet, what should school counselors *stop doing* in order to create antiracist schools and learning communities?

## Exhibit: ASCA Standard of Practice

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

*Racism and bias in the U.S. impede its citizens from achieving success and the nation from reaching its highest potential. Racism and bias manifest themselves overtly through verbal and physical harassment of people of color, tragically culminating in outcomes such as decreased mental well-being, joblessness, homelessness, and senseless and deadly violence against individuals, including Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous people. They manifest themselves subtly through unconscious bias, denial of access to privileges and benefits, and low expectations. The systemic and institutional racism that underlies violence toward people of color and relegates 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 in schools. School counselors have a unique opportunity to be an important part of the solution. Through implementation of an inclusive and antiracist 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 ultimately impede our nation from reaching its full potential, including the following:*

- *gaps in achievement, opportunity, and attainment*
- *disproportionate rates of discipline and suspension of students of color*
- *self-destructive behavior*
  - *acting out*
  - *withdrawal and lack of engagement in learning*
  - *nonparticipation in school activities*
- *disproportionate numbers/rates of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students in gifted education and college-preparation courses such as honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses*
- *lower participation of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students in higher education*

## Exhibit

### ASCA Position Statement on Cultural Diversity

*School counselors demonstrate cultural responsiveness by collaborating with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to promote the academic, career, and social/emotional success for all students.*

### ASCA Position Statement on Equity for All Students

*School counselors recognize and distinguish individual and group differences and strive to equally value all students and groups. School counselors are advocates for the equitable treatment of all students in school and in the community.*

## REDEFINING SCHOOL COUNSELING TO SERVE DIVERSE GROUPS

Over 15 years ago, Lee (2005) emphasized that schools must be willing to redefine traditional counseling models in order to serve diverse groups of students. Bemak and Chung (2005) and Green and Keys (2001) also reinforced the view that school counselors should be guided by (a) the acknowledgment of broad, systematic societal inequities and oppression and (b) the assumption of the inevitable, if unintentional, location of every individual (and the profession) within this system. In turn, this assumption leads the school counselor to take responsible action that contributes to the elimination of systematic oppression in the forms of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other biases. As such, school counselors who believe in creating socially just school environments must also work within an antiracist framework. Social justice and antiracism are complementary and expand the profession's commitment to multiculturalism and cultural competence. I propose an expanded role of school counseling that includes the dismantling of unequal systems and policies based on a long-standing history of white supremacy and consequential structural and systemic racism.

## FOCUSING ON ANTIRACISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

After the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020 by a white Minneapolis police officer, the discussion of police brutality, systemic racism, white supremacy, and racial justice became popular discussion topics in mainstream media. Mr. Floyd is not the first Black person whose death in police custody sparked protest. But his death was particularly gruesome and was recorded on video. The police officer, Derek Chauvin, kept his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for nearly

nine minutes—even as Mr. Floyd repeatedly said, “I can’t breathe.” The world watched as Derek Chauvin murdered a Black man, unarmed and not posing a threat to his surroundings.

Protests following the Floyd murder sparked emotion and an urgent call for policy change in law enforcement and other systems plagued by racial injustices. *Antiracism*, a concept used to describe the process of challenging and dismantling racism, also became the answer to solving the nation’s history of racism. The concept of antiracism, however, is not new. It has been utilized by many social scientists, educators, historians, and scholars who have studied racism for years. Essentially, there has been an impassioned struggle against racism as far back as John Brown’s white antislavery protests in the 1800s to Dr. Angela Davis’s championing of antiracism and anti-industrial complexes (prison systems) in the 1960s to the writing of “How to Be an Antiracist” by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi in 2019. At the Aspen Ideas Festival in 2019, Dr. Kendi profoundly stated, “The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it. That is the essence of antiracism.” Essentially, being an antiracist is an action-oriented stance in which one recognizes and works to eliminate racist ideas, practices, structures, policies, and beliefs in all levels of society and its institutions. It is much more than being “not racist.”

Educators, including school counselors, have been receptive to the idea of integrating an antiracist perspective to their work. Jamilah Pitts (2020), an author and education consultant, makes the case that antiracist practice in schools is “the exercise of hope, the practice of undoing and dismantling systems of oppression, the practice of freedom and of truth-telling. Antiracist work is the practice of healing and of restoring; it is a practice of love.” Dr. Bettina Love, a prolific writer and educator, coined the term *abolitionist teaching* as a form of antiracist education. Similar to Pitts, she views antiracism and abolitionist teaching as restoring humanity in schools. Her abolitionist framework for teaching borrows from the work of Dr. Angela Davis, who wrote that abolition of slavery didn’t end with the removal of chains. Instead, abolition begins with the development of institutions that allow for the incorporation of previously enslaved people into a democratic society.

Conceptually, antiracism is the school counseling profession’s social justice foundation. To be socially just, one must also be an antiracist. The same is true of cultural competence: One must be antiracist in order to be truly culturally competent.

A broad definition of *social justice* would be the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society. Whereas equal opportunity and human rights are applicable to everyone, social justice targets those groups of people who have been historically oppressed in society. Social justice recognizes that there are situations in which application of the same rules to unequal groups can generate unequal results. Social justice and antiracism provide a framework to assess the impact of policies and practices.

*Multicultural counseling*, on the other hand, refers to counseling in which the counselor and client take into account their cultural and lived experiences (Lee & Richardson, 1991). The focus of multicultural counseling is on the counseling process between two or more individuals who have different and distinct perceptions of the world. Typically, counselors who engage in effective multicultural counseling will promote social justice and will attend to the human rights of their clients.

After studying the work of scholars in counselor education (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Lee, 1995), counseling psychology (e.g., Cokley, 2006; Neville & Carter, 2005; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996), education (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Love, 2019), history (Anderson, 2016; Gordon-Reed, 2009; Kendi, 2017), law (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 2017), psychology (Spencer, 2019), and cultural studies (Gates, 2019; West, 1994), I believe the following set of assumptions are important to keep in mind when developing an antiracist foundation to school counseling:

- The status quo is characterized by inequitable distribution of power and resources based on race.
- Racism and other external sources (e.g., community, health, income, housing) influence behavior and attitudes.
- We all have internalized racist and biased attitudes, ideas, understandings, and patterns of thought that allow us to function in systems of oppression.

All forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, ableism (prejudice against those with disabilities), sexism, and heterosexism, clearly undermine the emotional and interpersonal well-being of students and thus potentially result in student underachievement and mental and emotional distress. Social justice and antiracist perspectives acknowledge the role that the status quo and dominant cultural values have in shaping the educational success and failure of youngsters, as evidenced by subsequent opportunity gaps. Recognition, then, of the cultural and racialized outcomes of traditional school counseling practice and theory encourages counselors to consider ways in which societal structure and the status quo either privileges them and their students or puts them at a disadvantage. Essentially, a social justice and antiracist approach to school counseling is centered on dismantling the status quo and creating new ways in which to affirm students and to ensure equitable and equal opportunities for all students. Table 2.1 presents differences between what might be considered traditional school counseling and an antiracist and social justice approach to school counseling.

## OPPRESSION AND ANTI-OPPRESSION EDUCATION

*Oppression* refers to a social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world—including certain ways of identifying or being identified—are normalized or

**TABLE 2.1 Traditional versus Antiracist and Social Justice Approaches in School Counseling**

TRADITIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELING	ANTIRACIST AND SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH TO SCHOOL COUNSELING
Dependence on counseling theories and approaches with little to no regard for the racial or cultural background of students	Dependence on strengths-based counseling, proactive coping strategies, spirituality and racial healing, and decentering “whiteness” in counseling theories. Major focus of counseling is on highlighting the strengths of students
Emphasis on individual student factors (e.g., unmotivated, depressed, angry)	Emphasis on sociocultural and environmental factors (e.g., racism, poverty) that influence students’ and educators’ behaviors
Little to no emphasis on racism and oppression and its influence on students	Major goal of school counseling program is to dismantle racist and oppressive practices and policies in schools
Emphasis on equality only	Emphasis on equality <i>and</i> equity
School counseling activities are typically implemented during the school day	School counseling activities are implemented during the school day <i>and</i> outside of school hours (e.g., advocating for policies, resources in the community)
Reliance on labels to identify students (e.g., defiant, aggressive)	Avoidance of labeling. Students are described by their strengths and positive characteristics
Little to no use of data to guide programming or to evaluate services	Dependence on data to highlight unevenness of student outcomes and to evaluate existing interventions
Focus on maintaining the status quo	Focus on creating antiracist, justice-oriented policies
Focus on providing student services to those students who are expected to achieve (student support is based on racist, stereotypical ideas about student demographic groups)	Focus on providing student supports and opportunities based on need and to increase equality and equity among student groups

privileged while other ways are oppressed or marginalized. Forms of oppression include racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, and ableism, among others. More specifically, oppression occurs in situations in which people are exploited, marginalized, or rendered powerless (Zutlevics, 2002). A faulty belief that people tend to subscribe to is that those who are oppressed are somehow less than or inferior to those who are not oppressed. *Internalized oppression* is the manner in which an oppressed group ironically comes to use the methods of the oppressor against itself.



Anti-oppressive education encourages us to critically analyze our common methods of educating to see if those methods contribute to the perpetuation of oppression. Common methods of educating include ability grouping, student exclusion for bad behavior, and providing more opportunities for students who score higher on standardized tests rather than supports for those that don't. Anti-oppressive education results in a deep commitment to changing how we think about and engage in many aspects of education, from curriculum and pedagogy to school culture and activities to institutional structure and policies. Ideally, educators will make a commitment to exploring perspectives that do not conform to what has become common sense in the field of education. Anti-oppressive education aims to challenge the status quo at the risk of being controversial and causing discomfort.

## CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical race theory (CRT), a legal framework, has become a highly politicized, catchall term used by conservative politicians to denote educational activities that address issues pertaining to race and racism. According to CRT critics, the underlying premise of CRT is anti-white education. This is not true. CRT was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by legal scholars as a means to address the law's role in producing and facilitating the role of racism, according to those who are marginalized, in the legal system. The school of thought—founded by academics including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and others—builds on critical legal studies and radical feminism. CRT examines the interconnected relationships among race, power, and the law. These concepts are not taught by pre-K–12 teachers and counselors.

The CRT debate in the U.S. is manufactured and is merely a political tactic to create fear, divide people by race, and maintain the status quo. While CRT is aligned with social justice and antiracist perspectives, these concepts are not synonymous. Many state legislators have proposed bills to bar educators from teaching about race and racism, including historical facts about colonialism, slavery, and other global atrocities (e.g., the Holocaust). The proposed anti-CRT policies mimic former President Donald Trump's Executive Order to stop funding for any type of training on CRT for federal employees, calling it a "propaganda effort." Anti-CRT critics also condemned the *1619 Project*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning report that tells the history of the first enslaved people who were brought to the American colonies. Nikole Hannah-Jones, the reporter who led the *1619 Project*, has been branded as "controversial" because she challenges the founding date of United States—July 4, 1776—by pointing out that August 20, 1619, is when a ship arrived at Point Comfort in the British colony of Virginia, bearing a cargo of 20–30 enslaved Africans. Their arrival marked the beginning of chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years.

So, what does CRT mean for school counselors? There are several core concepts of CRT that enhance the work of school counselors. First, school counselors must embrace historical facts and the consequences of historical events on the current lives of their students. Second, CRT encourages the development of counter-narratives of minoritized people, and these narratives are utilized to counter dominate educators' understanding of students and communities. In schools, antiracist school counselors should encourage storytelling as a means to validate the experiences of those students who are not often heard, including students of color, women/girls, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) students, and low-income students. And finally, antiracist school counselors expand the repertoire of their strategies and become skilled in strategies borne out of the experiences of Black and Brown people, such as African/Black-centered psychology (Akbar, 1996), Indigenous/Native therapeutic approaches (Hartmann & Gone, 2012), and strengths-based approaches (Arredondo, 2005).



## Counseling Snapshot

Before Doug, a school counselor, could give his beginning of the year presentation to his middle school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), chants of "No CRT!" echoed in the board room only to be countered by a teacher shouting out, "Stop whitewashing history!" Middle school parents packed the routine PTA meeting that quickly transformed into a tense setting. Conservative legislators, including the local mayor, had recently signed on to new state legislation aimed at keeping CRT out of classrooms. Although many of the parents who attended the PTA meeting were vocal critics of CRT, others were pushing for honest conversations about the country's painful racist history (e.g., slavery, Jim Crow laws) and more opportunities for teachers and counselors to learn about culturally responsive strategies in schools. The school's student enrollment is 55% white, 25% Black, 10% Asian, and 10% Latinx/Hispanic. Racial equity is one of the school's core values. Doug courageously gave remarks at the meeting; he addressed the following:

- The goals of school counseling are to serve all students equitably and equally and to ensure that all students have opportunities for success, including opportunities to learn U.S. historical facts about colonialism, immigration, slavery, and more.
- The school counseling program's core values include respect, honesty, equity and equality, and inclusion.
- Antiracist education and school counseling are means to achieve inclusion and true equality for all students.



## EQUITY VERSUS EQUALITY

Arthur Levine, former president of Columbia University's Teachers College, stated in the school's 2004 annual report that "the equity issue should be as important to education schools as AIDS or cancer is to medical schools" (Teachers College Columbia University, 2004, p. 3). I agree with Dr. Levine's statement and firmly believe that equity is at the core of a social justice approach to school counseling. At its most fundamental level, equity is an orientation toward doing the right thing by students (Marshall, 2002), which does not mean treating students equally regardless of their different needs. Imagine communities in which one's race, ethnicity, or culture is not the most powerful predictor of how one fares. In a racially equitable community, some children excel in school and some struggle—but race isn't the factor that makes the difference. Some families are wealthy and some are poor—and there are people of every race at both ends of the wealth spectrum and in the middle. A racially equitable community is one in which individuals and groups have racial/ethnic and cultural identities but those racial and ethnic identities do not predict whether an adolescent goes to college or jail or which groups are healthiest and how long they are likely to live on average.

Equity requires that school counselors treat students differently on the basis of aspects of the students' cultures, including race, ethnicity, gender, and economic class. However, decisions to treat students differently should always be based on students' specific needs. Equity demands that school counselors resist using aspects of culture or external factors (e.g., poverty, family status, disability) as excuses for not setting high standards and demanding the best of students. In short, equity forces school counselors and educators to focus on students' strengths, not their deficits.

Equality, in contrast, urges counselors and educators to enforce formal school policies in a consistent manner. Equality focuses on impartiality and retaining policies without regard to student differences or unique circumstances. Ideally, counselors and other educators should seek a balance between equity and equality in their school practices because both are critical to promoting success for all students. However, it is important to remember that school policies that are grounded in equity bring about different results than those that are based on equality. For example, a school may enforce their zero-tolerance discipline policy in terms of equality. However, when examining the data regarding the students who have been expelled because of the policy, school officials may realize that the policy is more detrimental to, say, Native American boys when executed equally. From an equity perspective, the school would then need to reevaluate its discipline policy and the core issues (e.g., low teacher expectations, tardiness) that are at the root of discipline problems among Native American boys. It could then develop a new discipline policy and train the staff to use a new discipline curriculum that includes more culturally appropriate discipline strategies.

The Resource section of this book features a list of questions that should be discussed by a school's leadership team to assess whether or not equity is being addressed by the school.



## Counseling Snapshot

### Scenario 1 (EQUITY)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Parish School District were required to move to all-remote classes. Many of the district students (about 25%) didn't have consistent access to internet service nor computers. There are communities with limited or unstable Wi-Fi capabilities. A majority of the students who had limited connectivity were also English language learner (ELL) students. The School Counseling Association pointed out the inequities in access to internet and computers across the district. As a result, the school board purchased loaner computers for students who needed them and provided communities with Wi-Fi trucks so that students could connect for service.

### Scenario 2 (EQUALITY)

Jamal, a high school counselor in an urban district, realized that students in the magnet program at his school were not being held to the same discipline standards as the students in the general population. He collected data that showed that—for the same offense—students in the magnet program were not issued the same punishment as students in the general population. As a result of Jamal's presentation of this data, the administration developed a new districtwide discipline policy for all students—including magnet and gifted students.

### Ask Yourself

Does the following scenario present an equity or equality issue?

At your high school, 62% of graduating seniors are offered admission to a four-year college or university. The most recent data indicate that only 5% of the students offered admission to four-year colleges and universities are Black or Latinx (Black and Latinx students make up 43% of the school's population). After further review of data, you discover that Black and Latinx students are disproportionately underrepresented in courses that are required for college admission, such as calculus and Advanced Placement English.

Is this an equity or equality issue? Why or why not? What would you do to ensure equity and equality in this case?

# KEY FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING BASED ON SOCIAL JUSTICE AND AN ANTIRACIST APPROACH

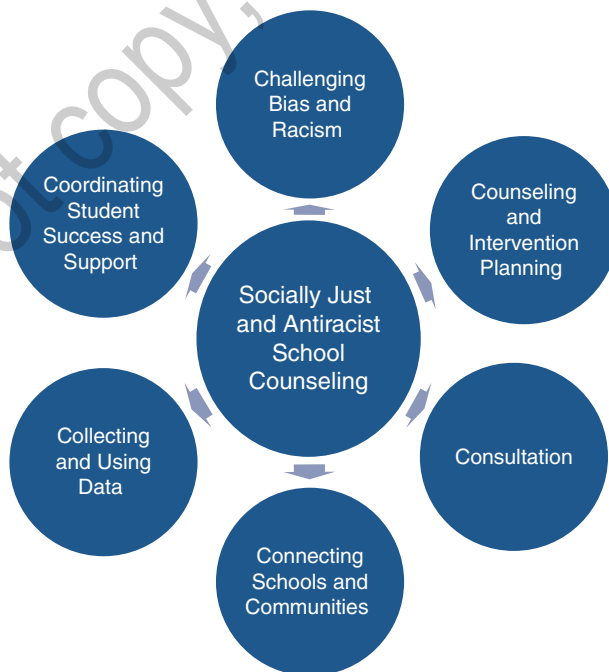
The following section outlines what I believe are six key functions (the six Cs) of school counselors who employ an antiracist and social justice approach in their work. (See Figure 2.1 on page 37.) The key functions include

1. counseling and intervention planning;
2. consultation;
3. connecting schools and communities;
4. collecting and utilizing data;
5. challenging bias and racism; and
6. coordinating student success and support.

## COUNSELING AND INTERVENTION PLANNING

This function includes implementing counseling and interventions that acknowledge and integrate students' racial, cultural, and familial experiences. The importance

**FIGURE 2.1 Six Key Functions of School Counselors Using an Antiracist and Social Justice Approach**



of school counselors being able to identify and recognize both the academic and social/emotional needs of Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Indigenous, and other minoritized youth is critical. It's imperative that school counselors utilize interventions and strategies that align with students' cultural and racial norms around healing.

Within the counseling process, antiracist school counselors acknowledge the intersectionality and multitude of contextual factors that impact students' development. For instance, in actuality, in any given year, more than 90% of Black youth over age eight will experience racial discrimination (Pachter & Coll, 2009) but many will also experience issues related to their gender, sexual orientation, and other social identities. School counselors, therefore, must utilize strategies for addressing the social and emotional effects of multiple identities and discriminatory issues. Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian American, and other minoritized youth will likely experience the ill effects of being subjected to not only the overt use of racist epithets by other students but also more subtle forms of discrimination, such as being omitted from consideration for advanced courses by teachers and staff, disproportionate scrutiny of their behavior, and the omission of their cultural and racial representation in the curriculum. For Black youth in particular, the negative physical, psychological, physiological, and academic effects of racism include traumatic symptoms (e.g., hypervigilance about potential acts of racism), diminished self-esteem, symptoms of depression, impaired academic self-concepts, decreased school engagement, and lower academic performance, to name a few (Chavous et al., 2008; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Wang & Huguley, 2012; Wong et al., 2003). And while racial trauma is not yet widely recognized as one of the diagnostic criteria for psychological problems, these intermediate symptoms likely result in not only individual difficulties but also population-level challenges, such as academic achievement gaps and a high (and growing) suicide rate among Black children (Saleem et al., 2019). Racialized stress among youth is a real phenomenon (Utsey, 1999) and has been documented.

Socially just, antiracist school counselors must place more emphasis on students within their environment, sometimes referred to as the *person-in-environment approach*. This focus takes into account students' background experiences, their interaction with others in their families and immediate community, the resources in their environment, and—most importantly—their adaptive and maladaptive interactions with other people in their environment. When using this approach to counseling interventions, a school counselor should consider giving special consideration to students' particular cultural values. By doing so, counselors will be better able to identify student problems within environmental and personal contexts and better able to refer students to specific community assistance programs, if relevant.

Counseling and intervention planning is ideally carried out by school counselors who are culturally competent and responsive. Cultural competence, broadly speaking, involves combining cultural awareness and sensitivity with a skill set to bring

about effective cross-cultural and multicultural practices (Moule, 2012). To assess your cultural knowledge, awareness, and ability to work with culturally diverse students and staff, turn to the School Counselor Multicultural Counseling Competence Checklist in the Resource section of this book (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004).



## Counseling Snapshot

Eric is a sixth-grade Black student at your school. In a recent class presentation by a local police officer, Eric yells out “I don’t trust the police! The police kill Black people.” Eric is immediately sent to the principal’s office. Later, the teacher and counselor learn that Eric’s older brother was involved in an altercation with local police after an incident in his neighborhood and he was arrested. Media coverage has depicted Eric’s brother as “a thug” who deserved to be arrested. The school counselor and principal decide to work with Eric rather than discipline him. The school counselor meets with the teacher to discuss differing views of police officers. The school counselor shares data regarding overpolicing in Eric’s community. Believing that Eric could be suffering from anxiety and depression, the school counselor also consults with a local therapist specializing in racialized stress and depression in Black adolescents.

### CONSULTATION

The consultation function involves school counselors’ work with parents and teachers to resolve students’ problems and concerns. Consultation, unlike counseling, is an indirect service delivery approach and can be used to influence change in an entire classroom, school, or family. Counselors can use consultation as a means to support parents, teachers, and students most appropriately so that counselors can better assist larger numbers of students. It is through the consultation function that a school counselor can serve as an advocate for students who are being either treated unfairly or who are unable to speak for themselves. Consultation also provides space for large-scale teacher consultation and professional development with aims of changing school culture, climate, and policies. Important roles include

- identifying school or student inequities during the consultation process with teachers, parents, and other educators;
- ongoing consultation with teachers and community members to educate them about how they can best support all students;
- attention to the cross-cultural, cross-racial nature of student–teacher interactions in teacher consultation; and
- attention to teacher and parent self-awareness in the consultation.



## Counseling Snapshot

A young female teacher has a reputation for sending at least one Latinx student to the office every day for discipline purposes. The principal addresses the matter with the teacher and asks the counselor to work with the teacher in order to reduce office referrals. Through several consultation sessions with the teacher, the counselor becomes aware of additional teachers' negative stereotypes and assumptions about Latinx students. The counselor works with the school leadership to design teacher professional development opportunities focused specifically on evidence-based strategies to increase Latinx students' academic and social emotional development. Consultation with the school leadership about discipline policy change is also a step in the counselor's plan of action.

### CONNECTING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Time is a precious commodity for all school-based educators. To the extent that they are able, antiracist and socially justice-focused school counselors must spend as much time as possible listening to and working in partnership with community organizations (e.g., nonprofit organizations, places of worship) and families to improve support services offered in the school. When working in this role, it is beneficial for counselors to be unbiased, flexible, and collaborative. By conducting culturally relevant and antiracist community programming, counselors can empower community members to advocate for policies and legislation that will improve and enhance opportunities for students. School-family-community partnerships have proven to be effective in raising the test scores of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse and low-income students (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).



## Counseling Snapshot

A middle school community has experienced a series of hate crimes targeting the influx of gay couples and transgender youth in one of its neighborhoods. The hate crimes have generated fear and the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic attitudes among students and families. Some community members talk as if pedophilia and homosexuality are the same. Many parents of transgender students worry about the safety of their children. The counselor initiates a work group of concerned parents, community members (including gay couples in the community), and school personnel. The committee's goal is to develop a plan for ceasing the hate crimes and educating the community on school policies and hate crime legislation in the city.



## COLLECTING AND UTILIZING DATA

Data help us make critical decisions related to inequities and social injustices that occur in schools. Data collection increases a school counselor's ability to monitor student progress and to understand which students may need more guidance or intervention. Counselors can better highlight social injustices and advocate for students and families by collecting, analyzing, and presenting data to colleagues. We can collect data pertaining to student test scores, attendance, dropout rates, suspension, expulsion, and grades. By analyzing the results, we are better able to discover achievement and opportunity gaps categorized by grade, race, immigration status, income, gender, disability, or any cultural specification.



### Counseling Snapshot

One of the school counselors at Saint Francis High School collected data indicating that 12% of eleventh-grade students drop out before graduation. Further analysis of the data showed that those who dropped out were primarily made up of Native American (42%) and Latinx (50%) girls. The counselor presented her data to the administration and her school counseling colleagues. After much discussion, they decide to present the data to the entire high school staff to spark a discussion of the root causes of the high dropout rate of girls of color.

## CHALLENGING BIAS AND RACISM

One of the most important functions of a school counselor within a social justice and antiracist framework is to challenge racism and bias in the school setting and community. Clearly, racism and bias can inhibit student achievement and influence the behavior and perceptions of educators. For this reason, we need to be diligent about identifying and challenging our own biases and racist ideas and those of others. We can then help to shape new policies that focus on providing students with equal and equitable experiences and opportunities. We can also incorporate social justice and antiracist education into the work we do with students.



### Counseling Snapshot

Tim, an elementary school counselor, is a member of the site-based leadership team at his school. During the selection process of a parent committee member, several committee members mentioned that the committee should choose a parent who is a stay-at-home

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

mother because she would be available for meetings and would understand the mission of the school. Tim opposed this idea and challenged the committee's ideas about who should participate on the leadership team. He felt that the committee was not giving all parents, particularly working parents who tended to be Black or Brown, an opportunity to participate in an important and powerful aspect of the school.

## COORDINATING STUDENT SUCCESS AND SUPPORT

The research suggests that far too often, low-income and racially and linguistically diverse students encounter watered-down curricula and unchallenging academic environments. Providing students with additional academic and social/emotional opportunities and supports to encourage and enhance their learning is important. Counselors can collaborate with organizations and institutions (e.g., local universities, civic groups) to provide these extra supports for students' academic and social/emotional development. School counselors who work from an antiracist and social justice framework focus on providing support for students who often have fewer high-quality academic services. Also, school counselors can use scheduling and other counselor activities (career and job fair coordination, individualized education program meetings, etc.) to advocate for increased access to opportunities that would further all students' potential for postsecondary opportunities.



### Counseling Snapshot

Dawn, a high school counselor, developed a partnership with a local university's admissions office and career center. She and university personnel developed a series of student experiences for juniors and seniors from underrepresented groups (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native American) at the university. The university provides free credit-bearing opportunities (e.g., dual enrollment) and college application and preparation support for students. Dawn manages the partnership and receives time and support from her school's leadership to maintain the partnership.

## Questions to Consider

1. How would you handle a situation where you want to challenge a particular bias that your fellow counselors are not willing to recognize?
2. Jot down a job description that could be used for your next school counselor opening. You want to ensure that the successful candidate is an antiracist and will help your team address gaps in students' opportunities. List interview questions you will ask the candidates.
3. In your own words, describe *student success*. Is your definition of success different from your friends' and colleagues' definitions? Who and what should define student success?
4. Social justice is often defined as providing fairness and equality for all. Do you think it is possible for all students to be treated equally in a school?
5. Antiracism is often misunderstood as being anti-white. What would you tell your colleagues if they have this opinion of your declaration of being an antiracist?

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