
Utilizing a Critical Race Theory Lens to Reduce Barriers to Social and Emotional Learning: A Call to Action

Blanca S. McGee, Andrea F. Germany, Regina L. Phillips, and Liza Barros-Lane

Social and emotional learning (SEL) and equity issues have each been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic for students of color. This brief seeks to call to action school social workers who can identify social and emotional barriers to learning that students of color experience in schools through a critical race theory (CRT) lens. School social workers are well positioned to address equity concerns and systemic racism in schools. They play a key role in addressing SEL, reducing equity barriers, and navigating the CRT opposition. The authors view the role of the school social worker as an integral part of social and emotional teaching and learning. This is a call to mobilize school social workers to advocacy roles for SEL, equity, and racism concerns that have long impacted students of color. The authors' aim is to provide social workers with actionable strategies in reducing social and emotional barriers to learning for students of color.

KEY WORDS: *COVID-19; critical race theory; racism; school social work; social and emotional learning*

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education. It is the process by which students learn how to “develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (Niemi, 2020, para. 3). While SEL is a process applied directly with students, it is embedded in a context that can be influenced and can influence the child’s experience (Mahoney et al., 2020). A systemic approach to SEL acknowledges the interrelatedness of students’ immediate context or proximal setting (e.g., classroom and home life with which they have direct interaction) and the more distant environment or distal setting (e.g., district and state policies that indirectly impact students; Mahoney et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has created severe disruptions in the distal setting that have significantly affected students’ proximal setting. Students have had to learn virtually, quarantine, isolate, experience family members’ illnesses, etc. during the COVID-19 pandemic (Courtney et al., 2020). As a result, many administrators have realized the need for more focused attention to students’ emotional

well-being and SEL. This is especially true for students of color, as they and their families have been the most impacted by issues in the distal setting, such as healthcare disparities, economic injustice, and lack of access to education and technology (Courtney et al., 2020; Rozenfeld et al., 2020). Researchers estimate that students of color

could be six to 12 months behind, [in learning] compared with four to eight months for white students by the end of the academic year. While all students are suffering, those who came into the pandemic with the fewest academic opportunities are on track to exit with the greatest learning loss. (Dorn et al., 2020, para. 4)

Additionally, students in urban and large school districts are most likely to have extended remote learning due to COVID concerns. Students of color are less likely to have access to private schools, pandemic pods, or homeschooling (Dorn et al., 2020).

This issue has relevance to school social workers, whose primary role is to strengthen students’ emotional well-being to promote academic achievement.

The ecological view of SEL fits well with the social work concept of person-in-environment (Tan et al., 2020) and can help school social workers enhance and remove barriers to emotional well-being for students of color. Additionally, social workers should consider using critical race theory (CRT) as a lens when assessing and intervening in the proximal and distal settings that affect the SEL of students of color. CRT helps to demonstrate how emotional well-being is impacted by power, privilege, and discrimination, and that in turn, all these impact educational outcomes. The purpose of this call to action is to discuss how school social workers can apply a CRT lens to SEL to identify and reduce systemic and racially based barriers to the emotional well-being of students of color.

TRANSFORMATIVE SEL

Historically, educational efforts at SEL have taken a race- and culturally neutral approach to teaching social and emotional competencies. However, a truly equitable and more comprehensive approach to SEL would foster self-awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills that recognize and honor diversity and the effects of the distal setting, such as systemic racism (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). The concept of transformational SEL is a means to articulate the potential of SEL to mitigate the educational, social, and economic inequities that derive from the inter-related legacies of racialized cultural oppression in the United States and globally (Jagers et al., 2019).

Transformative SEL is aimed at educational equity—fostering more equitable learning environments and producing equitable outcomes for children and young people furthest from opportunity (Jagers et al., 2019). This educational equity implies that every student has what they need when they need it, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income (Jagers et al., 2019). This includes examining biases and replacing inequitable practices with those that lend themselves to fertile, inclusive, multicultural learning environments that cultivate the interests and talents of children, youth, and adults from diverse backgrounds (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019, Jagers et al., 2019.). An approach that is inclusive of diverse backgrounds and rich cultural experiences, rather than a colorblind approach, is how equity is achieved in social-emotional teach-

ing and learning. Thus, it is necessary to consider a form of SEL that transforms individuals, interactions, and institutions in ways that support optimal human development and functioning for young people and adults regardless of circumstances or background (Jagers et al., 2019).

CASEL (2020) has emphasized that equity is woven into SEL and, as such, promotes equity in education through the development of alliances between school, parents, and community. As school leaders, social workers should focus on SEL and equity, which implies recognizing the conditions, culture, climate, and settings that shape learning (Tan et al., 2020). Furthermore, school social workers should assess how other school leaders' beliefs, mindsets, and policies further oppress students of color. Through the lens of CRT, an understanding of the current condition is predicated on a historical awareness of the ways race has played a role in students' experiences in the school setting.

HISTORICAL RACISM AND EQUITY BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

In the early 2000s, equity concerns in education emerged at the forefront of policies addressing systemic racism (Alemán, 2006; Skrla et al., 2001). Skrla et al. (2001) urged educators to develop and work cautiously through a strategic plan. Additionally, they recommended a reasonable commitment to social and racial justice for students of color experiencing poverty. The researchers called for a proactive and evaluative approach to addressing systemic racism in schools. They concluded that schools would have to explore racial disparities and demonstrate a commitment to addressing the concerns as they emerge (Alemán, 2006; Skrla et al., 2001). The result would be advancing social equity and uniformity as core values for school change and instructive strategy. From 2006 to 2007, educational leadership focused on diversity, race, social justice, and equity (Alemán, 2006). In 2009, Alemán authored several manuscripts advocating for school finance reform and identified areas of systemic racism and racial inequities in school districts (see Alemán, 2007, 2009). The early 2000s initiated equity discussions and exploration of systems that marginalized and oppressed students of color, but SEL had not yet been prioritized in education. The research suggested that educational reform with a focus on equity was imperative. It began the

future antiracism approach to education that we see today. Moreover, future social workers were emerging as neoliberalists, as schools of social work focused on equity in social work practice. School social workers emerged as leaders in cultural competence and, through a more culturally competent lens, began identifying the need to address racism in schools (Brooks et al., 2013; Radd & Grosland, 2019; Welton et al., 2015).

By the mid-2000s, educational researchers argued that school administrators either promoted or impeded racial equity in schools. They further argued that some school leaders “influence second-generation segregation in urban secondary schools” through the use of curricular grouping, thereby limiting the academic opportunities for minority students (Brooks et al., 2013, p. 27). Additionally, Knaus (2014) and Martinez (2015) researched systemic racism and equity in schools. They found that school administrators who claimed to use equitable practices contradictorily believed that White teachers were more successful in teaching because they produced better test scores than Black teachers. Yet, Black teachers were labeled as specialists in culturally responsive methodologies for students of color and, as a result, were given increased obligations but were not provided with comparable promotions (Knaus, 2014). In response to administrator biases, Martinez (2015) suggested that all educators should be provided with a social justice pedagogy and an opportunity to self-reflect on their biases and worldviews to ensure that they will equitably serve the increasingly diverse students in schools.

CALL TO ACTION

School Social Work Practice through CRT Lens

It is important to note that school social workers are bridging equity gaps and striving to overcome the effects of racism, even during a global pandemic, to ensure that all children have access to a fair and equitable education. CRT suggests that racism is the usual way society conducts itself, and it is the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). With CRT in mind, school social workers address racism as the absolute most basic hindrance to building powerful alliances for social change in schools (Morelli & Spencer, 2000). Furthermore, racism, bigotry, and prejudice have been

intentionally and efficiently created. Still these inclinations may very well be undone once individuals comprehend what they are, where they originate from, how they work, and what sustains them. Even though CRT developed in law, it has quickly spread to other disciplines. Today, numerous academics in the field of education see themselves as CRT scholars who utilize CRT’s plans to comprehend issues of school discipline, state assessments, history, and IQ testing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT provides a framework for inspecting power structures that foster racial imbalance and creates techniques for advocacy and change. Although social work recognizes racial disparities and the function of bigotry when endeavoring to address social issues, social work has not wholly embraced CRT in practice, leaving social workers lacking direction (Kolivoski & Weaver, 2014).

Now more than ever, CRT is at the intersection of COVID-19 health, equity, and disparities. Social workers will be better able to identify systemic racism and equity concerns by using a CRT lens in practice with vulnerable populations affected by COVID-19. Liu and Modir (2020) suggest that COVID-19 has a disproportionately negative impact on people of color, particularly Asian people who have experienced increased discrimination (Tavernise & Oppel, 2020). African Americans also experienced discrimination during the pandemic and have a higher COVID-19 death rate than any other racial group. The current statistics reveal that African American people make up 33 percent of the death toll from COVID-19, yet they make up only 13 percent of the population (Wolf, 2020). Americans were not prepared for the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their health, finances, and education. African Americans faced a battle for their health. Rozenfeld et al. (2020) found that the risk of COVID-19 infection is greater in vulnerable populations who have already been affected by health disparities. Moreover, Sneed et al. (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic made it incredibly clear that social determinants in well-being are key factors that impact one’s capacity to securely survive a worldwide pandemic of an exceptionally contagious virus. Furthermore, even though the significance of social determinants in health has been evidenced, adequately tending to them remains challenging (Sneed et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic in the United States is compounding differences in fi-

nancial and basic health status for people of color at higher rates than for their counterparts, who are White individuals of higher socioeconomic status (Brown et al., 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Rozenfeld et al., 2020; Sneed et al., 2020). Fortuna et al. (2020) suggest that preexisting health inequities are the foundation of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people of color.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the racial and socioeconomic inequities students in American schools are currently battling. In addition to being at a higher risk of death or health complications due to COVID-19, students of color will experience higher levels of cumulative learning loss due to school closures. Experts estimated that by the end of the 2020 academic year, students of color could be a year behind compared with White students. COVID-19 has stealthily brought racism and inequity to the forefront of issues that students of color are experiencing. Using a CRT lens, social workers are the opportune leaders to address, advocate against, and change systemic racism during this pandemic.

CRT has applications in many areas, such as policy, criminal justice, social organization, and linguistics. Yet, the increasing need for educators to utilize CRT to address the role of oppression and oppressors in our current K-12 educational system has become heightened due to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. As social workers and educators address racial and socioeconomic disparities in education and access to services, ranging from preventive healthcare to the internet for online learning, acknowledging the role of racism in conversations about equity and access can be affirming to minority students and faculty. The use of this antiracist approach in addressing students' SEL is inherently important as students encounter more stressors due to COVID-19, such as online learning, social isolation, health concerns for themselves and family members, financial concerns, and political and social unrest. Now more than ever, students of color need and deserve to have their racial and ethnic experiences recognized as they learn the skills to navigate an unjust world. Future research should focus on the social determinants and health disparities that increase the susceptibility of infection for people of color with social justice and equity lenses, as there remains a gap in the literature to date.

Advocating against Whiteness

Whiteness, or the philosophy that studies power over structures to sustain racial imbalance, is fundamental to CRT. Examining whiteness helps social workers uncover its force, unpredictability, and normativity and exemplifies the impact on students. These stereotypes further inequities by allowing dominant groups, especially upper-income White people, to affix blame to the disadvantaged for their life circumstances as they continue to justify unearned privilege (Goff et al., 2014). Recently, leaders in education accepted the need for racism and equity training for educators to move beyond the whiteness practices in schools (Anderson, 2019; Horsford et al., 2019; Radd & Grosland, 2019; Welton et al., 2015). Welton et al. (2015) suggest that school leaders should confront complex racial issues in schools and provide authority, direction, and practices that focus on antiracism. Moreover, researchers found a need for leaders in schools to take the initiative for equity, diversity, and social justice through genuinely necessary racial pragmatist and fundamental points of view on how educators should lead amid community disinvestment, gentrification, and neoliberal school changes (Horsford et al., 2019). School leaders are urged to continue to promote initiatives and practices that more expressly center around antiracism rather than those molded by broad structures related to equity and access (Welton et al., 2015). A focus on equity and access is essential, as most students in schools are persons of color, yet most teachers and administrators are White (Watson, 2005). In that capacity, researchers discovered that even educators who are antiracist in their philosophies and practices can be tested by colleagues into maintaining whiteness to keep up the racial business as usual (Radd & Grosland, 2019; Welton et al., 2015). Educators, including school social workers, have a responsibility to understand that students of color do not have the privilege of *not* addressing racial issues (Watson, 2005). The philosophy of whiteness attempts to secure White-driven power structures and sustain racial imbalances; thus, schools must have a decisive antiracism goal to mitigate the impact of whiteness (Welton et al., 2018). Watson (2005) outlines that school leaders and teachers should not only talk about race but also address how to be antiracist. From 2009 to 2019, researchers suggested that schools use an antiracist knowledge base to subvert the truth of whiteness through intentional policy

planning (Alemán, 2009; Flintoff et al., 2015; Mlcek, 2014; Radd & Grosland, 2019; Welton et al., 2015). In this endeavor, a school social worker remains in a prime position to advocate for change in addressing whiteness, primarily through social and emotional teaching and learning.

Strategies

When assuming a CRT lens and committing to opposing white supremacy, there are practical strategies that school social workers can utilize to support the SEL of students of color in their proximal and distal settings. Social workers must make a concerted effort to create an environment that is both culturally sustaining and culturally revitalizing; in a recent article, Kaler-Jones (2020) stated, “SEL devoid of culturally-affirming practices and understandings is not SEL at all” (para. 5).

As students, teachers, school social workers, and administrators return to school buildings, they face unprecedented challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the opposition to the use of CRT by policymakers. The school social worker is trained in addressing these issues and advocating for change. The following is a list of recommendations in the proximal and distal settings to reduce racism and equity barriers in schools, and they are presented in a varied order of importance, as each school social worker must determine their school’s needs and priorities:

- (1) Complete assessments that include (a) school-wide equity audits, (b) antibias self-assessments, and (c) student needs assessments to assess equity concerns. One example of such an approach is found in Western Washington University, a predominantly White university, where a comprehensive framework was developed to evaluate the needs of their minority students and focus on a paradigm shift (Western Washington University, 2021). Based on hundreds of surveys and hours of focus groups and conversations, they narrowed their focus to three primary areas of need for student success to evaluate: (1) safety and survival, (2) educational access, and (3) institutional and structural biases.

By utilizing this framework, staff were first able to address student needs related to housing, mental well-being, food-security, financial well-being, safety, and physical needs.

Next, they were able to address educational access issues, such as internet access, educational support from the school, and culturally sensitive instruction. Finally, the university was able to garner information and address needs such as access to BIPOC instructors and mentors, culturally competent faculty and staff, and peer and family support. Similarly, K–12 schools could also implement this format of assessment to evaluate student needs followed by coalition building and programmatic planning to meet achievable goals aimed at helping students of color within both the school environment and the community.

- (2) Provide safe environments for students of color to process and express the effects of racism or social injustice. This can be done by holding support groups, morning meetings, or afterschool sessions. Creating a Black student union or having more than one Black student representative on the school board, where these conversations can be held and the experience of being Black in school can be discussed. The social worker should help establish group rules and norms that honor the students’ experiences and build a supportive and nurturing community. Also, social workers in schools should consider offering opportunities such as affinity groups for students and faculty to help educate and build the capacity for more informed conversations about race and biases, and to empower participants toward activism and advocacy.
- (3) Social workers in schools should help create a safe environment for White students and staff to learn about racism and its effects. This could be specifically for allies who wish to learn about the lived experience of students of color and who wish to contribute to work of equity. This should be an environment where people feel safe to learn about systemic racism, to confront their own internal biases without shame, and to grow in their support of their counterparts of color.
- (4) Provide access to the necessary resources to effectively address student academic and SEL loss caused by inequities for students of color. This can be done by providing internet access to complete assignments at home

through the use of hot spots or an afterschool internet café where students can complete homework assignments, and by providing access to bus transportation later in the day. Additionally, school social workers could provide small bibliotherapy groups, reading with a small group of students who demonstrate disproportionate learning loss in reading. These small groups could focus on reading SEL books that build on any of the five core competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

- (5) Educate and train faculty and staff on the effects of whiteness and racism in schools for students of color through a trauma-informed lens. School officials, including school social workers, should be trained in trauma-informed practices and their impact on learning, and should relate the effects of whiteness and racism as adverse childhood experiences, so real school reform and educational justice can be realized. This training could be required for all school faculty and personnel who work directly with students or who supervise student activities. This would be a foundational approach to establishing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for all students. Educators with proper training will identify students who require additional academic or social-emotional support. Additionally, a foundational tier one should include a universal SEL curriculum that is used consistently throughout all campus grade levels. Researchers [Anyon et al. \(2016\)](#) found that school social workers should be actively involved in the implementation of SEL programs, curriculum, and interventions. By supporting staff using SEL strategies and curriculum, school social workers can coach teachers and staff on building SEL competencies. Finally, school social workers are encouraged to have pre-identified trauma-informed interventions and supports that can be implemented on tier two or tier three, such as individual or small group counseling, for students requiring these levels of intervention to effectively mitigate the academic and SEL needs.
- (6) Challenge areas in education that contribute to systemic racism and further marginalize

students of color, such as states banning the teaching of racism or using CRT in schools. Today, as more states have officially banned the teaching or use of CRT in schools, it may be necessary for social workers to take a teleological approach to ethical decision making. The teleological approach advocates for the necessity of acting based on the inherent goodness of the consequences of such an action. Social workers may be morally justified to approach an oppressive system in school in a more subverted manner. This may be done by:

- (a) Providing discipline data related to policies and practices that disproportionately affect students of color to stakeholders and advocating for change, through training or equity audits. By specifically reviewing school policies, including district discipline policies, and implementing district-mandated discipline reform regarding the use of exclusionary discipline. [Barrett et al.'s \(2017\)](#) new Louisiana study of statewide student-level data found that Black students were 10 percent more likely than their White counterparts to be suspended, and Black students who received free lunches were 16 percent more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts who were not free-lunch-eligible. This indicates that while Black students were at a higher risk of being suspended, poor Black students were at an even greater risk ([Gordon, 2018](#)).
- (b) Providing academic data related to the disparate representation of students of color in advanced academic courses to stakeholders and advocating for increased access to these courses.
- (c) Examining the achievement gap, as it shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures ([Ansell, 2004/2011](#)). By evaluating the performance gap data between Black or Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic White peers, educators can better tailor instruction to meet the needs of students of color.
- (d) Providing college, career, and military readiness data related to disproportionate representation of students of color in any of these areas to

stakeholders and advocating for increased access in future planning.

- (e) Advocating for a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion committee that provides data and direction for the entire school district.
- (f) Actively monitoring instances when educators are unjustly reprimanded for teaching appropriate diversity and inclusion curriculum and advocate on their behalf. Social workers should recognize that race and racism have often been taboo subjects and CRT may feel like an attack upon White people. We must continue to educate and further the knowledge that CRT does not vilify one particular race, but rather focuses on the impacts of racism as encoded on policy and its effects on society. Moving forward with these difficult conversations can only further helpful dialogue and efforts to promote an understanding of CRT and reduce resistance to it and its tenets.

The school social worker is well positioned to transform the current educational systems that continue to oppress students of color. School social workers must continue to adhere to the profession's core belief in honoring the dignity and worth of the individual. Every school social worker is encouraged to address the traumatic effects of systemic racism that are often complicated by inequities in education through advocacy and the teaching of SEL competencies. Because of the recent attack on CRT at the legislative level, this will require a clear understanding of CRT policies in certain states in order to have a solid implementation plan.

CONCLUSION

As students of color experience increased social isolation, increased stress, and decreased supervision in their homes due to distance learning, skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills will be essential. However, no SEL intervention will be complete if it does not address the greater ecological context of racial disparity. K–12 education has the opportunity to address racial inequality in all areas of policy through the application of a CRT lens and ensuing strategies. While a focus on SEL in the proximal setting on its own is not

enough to tackle the profound racism and equity disparities in schools, it can be the catalyst for parents, students, faculty, and staff to create stronger relationships and to examine the distal setting through the lens of CRT. **CS**

REFERENCES

- Alemán, E. (2006). Is Robin Hood the “Prince of Thieves” or a pathway to equity? Applying critical race theory to school finance political discourse. *Educational Policy*, 20, 113–143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904805285290>
- Alemán, E. (2007). Situating Texas school finance policy in a CRT framework: How “substantially equal” yields racial inequity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43, 525–559. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07303276>
- Alemán, E. (2009). Laterit educational leadership and advocacy: Struggling over whiteness as property in Texas school finance. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 42, 183–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680902744246>
- Anderson, R. E. (2019). The strength of Black families: A commentary on leading with racial equity. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 22, 333–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2019.1681619>
- Ansell, S. E. (2004, September 10). *Achievement gap*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/achievement-gap/2004/09> [Updated July 7, 2011]
- Anyon, Y., Nicotera, N., & Veeh, C. A. (2016). Contextual influences on the implementation of a schoolwide intervention to promote students' social, emotional, and academic learning. *Children & Schools*, 38, 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw008>
- Barrett, N., McEachin, A., Mills, J., & Valant, J. (2017). Disparities in student discipline by race and family income. <https://educationresearchhaliancenoia.org/files/publications/010418-Barrett-McEachin-Mills-Valant-Disparities-in-Student-Discipline-by-Race-and-Family-Income.pdf>
- Brooks, J. S., Arnold, N. W., & Brooks, M. C. (2013). Educational leadership and racism: A narrative inquiry into second-generation segregation. *Teachers College Record*, 115, 1–28.
- Brown, I. M., Khan, A., Slocum, J., Campbell, L. F., Lacey, J. R., & Landry, A. M. (2020). COVID-19 disparities and the Black community: A health equity-informed rapid response is needed. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110, 1350–1351. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305804>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 17). Hospitalization rates and characteristics of patients hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed coronavirus disease 2019—COVID-NET, 14 states, March 1–30, 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69, 458–464. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e3.htm>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2020, October 14). *Advancing social and emotional learning*. <https://casel.org/>
- Courtney, D., Watson, P., Battaglia, M., Mulsant, B. H., & Szatmari, P. (2020). COVID-19 impacts on child and youth anxiety and depression: Challenges and opportunities. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 65, 688–691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743720935646>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educa-

- tional practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24, 97–140. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory*. New York University Press.
- Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020, December 8). *Covid-19 and learning loss: Disparities grow and students need help*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>
- Flintoff, A., Dowling, F., & Fitzgerald, H. (2015). Working through whiteness, race and (anti) racism in physical education teacher education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 20, 559–570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2014.962017>
- Fortuna, L. R., Tolou-Shams, M., Robles-Ramamurthy, B., & Porche, M. V. (2020). Inequity and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color in the United States: The need for a trauma-informed social justice response. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12, 443–445. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000889>
- Goff, P. A., Martin, K. D., & Wilde, V. K. (2014). Dehumanization as a distinct form of prejudice. *Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 21, 301–307.
- Gordon, N. (2018, January 18). Disproportionality in student discipline: Connecting policy to research. *Brookings Report*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/disproportionality-in-student-discipline-connecting-policy-to-research>
- Horsford, S. D., Stovall, D., Hopson, R., & D'Amico, D. (2019). School leadership in the New Jim Crow: Reclaiming justice, resisting reform. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 18, 177–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1611872>
- Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Williams, B. (2019). Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Toward SEL in service of educational equity and excellence. *Educational Psychologist*, 54, 162–184.
- Kaler-Jones, C. (2020, May 7). *When SEL is used as another form of policing*. <https://medium.com/@justschools/when-sel-is-used-as-another-form-of-policing-fa53cf85dce4>
- Kolivoski, K. M., Weaver, A., & Constance-Huggins, M. (2014). Critical race theory: Opportunities for application in social work practice and policy. *Families in Society*, 95, 269–276. <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.2014.95.36>
- Knaus, C. B. (2014). Seeing what they want to see: Racism and leadership development in urban schools. *Urban Review*, 46, 420–444. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0299-0>
- Liu, S. R., & Modir, S. (2020). The outbreak that was always here: Racial trauma in the context of COVID-19 and implications for mental health providers. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12, 439–442. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000784>
- Mahoney, J. L., Weissberg, R. P., Greenberg, M. T., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R. J., Niemi, K., Schlinger, M., Schlund, J., Shriver, T. P., VanAudsal, K., & Yoder, N. (2020). Systemic social and emotional learning: Promoting educational success for all pre-school to high school students. *American Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000701>
- Martinez, M. A. (2015). Engaging aspiring educational leaders in self-reflection regarding race and privilege. *Reflective Practice*, 16, 765–776. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2015.1095727>
- Mleck, S. (2014). Are we doing enough to develop cross-cultural competencies for social work? *British Journal of Social Work*, 44, 1984–2003. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct044>
- Morelli, P. T., & Spencer, M. S. (2000). Use and support of multicultural and antiracist education: Research-informed interdisciplinary social work practice. *Social Work*, 45, 166–175. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/45.2.166>
- Niemi, K. (2020, December 15). *Niemi: CASEL is updating the most widely recognized definition of social-emotional learning. Here's why*. <https://www.the74million.org/article/niemi-casel-is-updating-the-most-widely-recognized-definition-of-social-emotional-learning-heres-why/>
- Radd, S. I., & Grosland, T. J. (2019). Desirablizing Whiteness: A discursive practice in social justice leadership that entrenches White supremacy. *Urban Education*, 54, 656–676. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918783824>
- Rozenfeld, Y., Beam, J., Maier, H., Haggerson, W., Boudreau, K., Carlson, J., & Meadows, R. (2020). A model of disparities: Risk factors associated with COVID-19 infection. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 19, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-01242-z>
- Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Johnson, J. F., & Koschoreck, J. W. (2001). Accountability for equity: Can state policy leverage social justice? *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 4, 237–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120120176>
- Sneed, R. S., Key, K., Bailey, S., & Johnson-Lawrence, V. (2020). Social and psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in African-American communities: Lessons from Michigan. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12, 446–448. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000881>
- Tan, K., Heath, D., & Olson, S. (2020, January 14). *Promoting social and emotional learning within school social work: What's out there?* School Social Work Association of America. <https://www.sswaa.org/post/promoting-social-and-emotional-learning-within-school-social-work-what-s-out-there>
- Tavernise, S., & Opper, R. A., Jr. (2020, March 23). Spit on, yelled at, attacked: Chinese-Americans fear for their safety. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>
- Watson, D. (2005). *Norming suburban: How urban-trained teachers describe teaching in urban schools*. Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- Weaver, T., Jr. (2020, June 16). *Antiracism in social-emotional learning: Why it's not enough to talk the talk*. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-06-16-antiracism-in-social-emotional-learning-why-it-s-not-enough-to-talk-the-talk>
- Welton, A., Diem, S., & Carpenter, B. W. (2018). Negotiating the politics of antiracist leadership: The challenges of leading under the predominance of whiteness. *Urban Education*, 54, 627–630. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918783830>
- Welton, A. D., Harris, T. O., La Londe, P. G., & Moyer, R. T. (2015). Social justice education in a diverse classroom: Examining high school discussions about race, power, and privilege. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 48, 549–570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2015.1083839>

Western Washington University. (2021). *Underrepresented student needs assessment project*. <https://sjec.wvu.edu/underrepresented-student-needs-assessment-project>

Wolf, J. (2020, April 6). *African Americans more likely to die from coronavirus illness, early data shows*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-race/african-americans-more-likely-to-die-from-coronavirus-illness-early-data-shows-idUSKBN21O2B6>

Blanca S. McGee, LCSW-S, is executive director of social and emotional learning, Grand Prairie Independent School District, 2602 S. Beltline Road, Grand Prairie, TX 75052, USA; email: blanca.mcgee@gpisd.org. **Andrea F. Germany, LMSW**, is director of field education and instructor, Mississippi State University, Meridian, MS, USA. **Regina L. Phillips, MSW**, is cofounder and chief operating officer, Cross Cultural Community Services, Portland, ME, USA. **Liza Barros-Lane, PhD, LMSW**, is assistant professor, University of Houston-Downtown, Houston, TX, USA.

Original manuscript received January 11, 2021
Final revision received September 28, 2021
Editorial decision October 1, 2021
Accepted October 15, 2021