



## **POSITION STATEMENT:** RACIAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

### ► PURPOSE

To acknowledge the important role school leaders play in addressing systemic racism, which has often been perpetuated by our school systems, and to offer policy recommendations to help educators deliberately employ anti-racist practices as they work to dismantle those systems that create barriers and perpetuate race-based inequities for students of color.

### ► ISSUE

Of the 50.7 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in fall 2017, 24.1 million were white, 7.7 million were Black, 13.6 million were Hispanic, 2.8 million were Asian/Pacific Islander, half a million were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2 million were two or more races. The percentage of students who were white decreased from 61 to 48 percent between fall 2000 and fall 2017, and it is projected to continue decreasing to 44 percent by fall 2029. In many urban areas, a majority of students of color attend public schools where at least 75 percent of students are from low-income families. Segregation and redlining have caused these neighborhoods to also have lower property values, which results in fewer financial resources for their schools. In addition, districts serving the largest populations of students of color receive, on average, about \$1,800 less per student—or \$23 billion total—in federal, state, and local funding than school districts that predominantly serve white districts.

Because many students have not been afforded equitable learning opportunities, average reading scores and math scores have been lower for students of color on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than their white peers since 1992. U.S. schools have also reported persistent racial gaps in other academic achievement measures, graduation rates, and postsecondary education. But a recent report from the Learning Policy Institute highlighted school districts in California that are closing the

## ▶ ISSUE—CONTINUED

opportunity gap, and students of color are achieving at higher levels than their peers in other districts. Some of the factors in common included a widely shared, well-enacted vision that prioritizes learning for each child; continuous leadership from instructionally engaged leaders; systemic supports for students' academic, social, and emotional needs; and engagement of families and communities.

The 2020 killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, KY, have prompted a national racial reckoning, and policymakers have been called to examine issues of racial justice in institutions, including K–12 schools. While many school leaders have made great strides to ensure educational equity for each student, the education system has perpetuated systemic racism for decades through both overt aggressive racism and through microaggressions—such as words and language used by educators that denigrate students and staff of color, discriminatory language or violent practices, and tolerance of actions by other students and/or their family members. Racism has also been perpetuated through policies and practices such as exclusionary discipline, inadequate access to experienced educators, lack of a diverse curriculum, inequitable funding and staffing in schools serving large numbers of students of color, tracking, and school segregation.

Unfortunately, many educators are not aware of their own identities and privileges and how they impact their work with students. And they receive little training on how to identify and actively support solutions that will prevent racial injustice and increase educational equity. A survey conducted by *Education Week* found that 82 percent of educators had not received anti-racist training in their preparation programs and 59 percent do not have the training or resources to support an anti-racist curriculum. Most school leaders reported taking only one or two courses on equity or culturally responsive leadership in their principal preparation programs.

## ▶ NASSP GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- NASSP condemns racial violence and structural racism that permeates every dimension of American life, including in education spaces, and calls on school leaders to embrace racial justice and educational equity.
- NASSP believes that principals have the power to identify racism, advocate antiracist strategies, lift up students and staff of color, and ultimately construct a better school and society.
- At its core, equity is a commitment to social justice, civil rights, and human connectedness. *Building Ranks™: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective School Leaders* describes equity as the behaviors, systems, processes, resources, and environments that ensure each member of the school community is provided fair, just, and individualized learning and growth opportunities; and that school leaders guarantee that each person is known, valued, and treated justly and receives the individualized high-quality education that is necessary to succeed in a global society.

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## ▶ NASSP GUIDING PRINCIPLES—CONTINUED

- The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders state that effective leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
- NASSP has previously adopted position statements on [culturally responsive schools](#), [educator diversity](#), [poverty and its impact on students](#), [school resources offices and law enforcement in schools](#), [school discipline](#), [promoting rigorous courses for all students](#), [school facilities](#), and the [achievement gap](#) in order to offer recommendations for policymakers and school leaders to promote student equity and help each student achieve their greatest potential.

## ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS

- Fully fund Title I of the ESEA, which provides funds to school districts to help historically marginalized students—two-thirds of whom are students of color—with reading, language arts, and mathematics instruction through schoolwide approaches or targeted assistance strategies.
- Fulfill Congress's obligation of full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by appropriating 40 percent of the excess cost of educating students with disabilities.
- Fully fund Title II of the ESEA, which can be used to strengthen school leader preparation programs and professional learning opportunities to better support students of color.
- In the next ESEA reauthorization, adjust formula-funded programs to ensure that a higher proportion is allocated to high-poverty states and districts and explore how the law's provisions can assist states and districts in addressing racial injustice in our school systems.
- Offer incentives for states to conduct racial equity audits, address racial disparities resulting from gaps in educational opportunity, and develop a framework for applying a racial equity lens to all education policies and programs.
- Provide adequate funding for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, whose mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights.
- Enforce comparability provisions in the latest version of ESEA—the Every Student Succeeds Act—to ensure districts and schools serving students of color have access to fully certified, experienced, and effective school leaders and teachers.
- Provide federal funding to support voluntary school district efforts to study segregation, evaluate current policies, and develop and implement evidence-based plans to address socioeconomic and racial isolation.

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## ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS—CONTINUED

- Create a competitive grant program to increase the enrollment and support the performance of students of color in advanced courses and programs.
- Authorize a federal grant program for states to modernize, innovate, renovate, or repair public school facilities to be safe, healthy, high-performing, and technologically up to date.

## ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

- Invest in school districts serving a high proportion of students of color and low-income students, improve transparency and school funding formulas to better target funding to students of color, and adopt other policies to address racial inequities in schools.
- Utilize statewide longitudinal data systems to provide information disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and income status to identify trends in student attendance, college readiness, and other educational equity issues across the P-20 pipeline.
- Encourage school leader preparation programs to hire faculty with experience in teaching about race and inequality; embed coursework on critical race theory, race, and racism throughout the curriculum; help principals lead culturally responsive schools; and provide candidates with ongoing mentoring and support, networking, and other professional learning opportunities upon completion.
- Incentivize teacher preparation programs to help candidates understand their own racial biases and develop skills to create inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms and school environments that address the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students.
- Collect and publicly report data on teacher certification, experience, and effectiveness and assignments at the district level and within schools, and develop a plan to address disparities in access for students of color.
- Provide funding for districts to offer more gifted and talented, AP/IB, and dual-enrollment opportunities, and universally screen and enroll all high-achieving students in these advanced courses.
- Ensure that history, social studies, and civics curricula and instructional materials include accurate representations of the role of race in American history and governance, and decolonize all curriculum to ensure accuracy and credit for innovation of racially diverse historical figures.
- Engage education stakeholders in regular discussions about racial justice, educational equity, and other challenges in the education system as state-level policies are being developed.
- Offer opportunities for student leaders of diverse backgrounds to have a voice in state-level policy discussions such as through participation on state boards of education or other advisory groups.

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## ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT LEADERS

- Clearly articulate a vision for racial justice and adopt a district-wide definition of educational equity that aligns with state equity definitions in collaboration with community members that applies to all school leaders, educators, and staff in every school.
- Establish interview and hiring goals and offer professional development opportunities for district staff to ensure that district hiring practices eliminate racial bias and discrimination through transparent and explicit hiring criteria, advertisements of job openings to diverse communities, and an interview and selection process that begins in the spring.
- Ensure that curriculum content, instructional materials, and assessments are inclusive of Black history and culture, prevent racial bias, and expose students to diverse perspectives and worldviews.
- Promote racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools and classrooms by analyzing student assignments, course enrollment, participation in cocurricular activities, and transportation patterns in schools.
- Develop a framework for school leaders to help them ensure diverse perspectives are included in decision-making processes and solutions will have a positive impact on students of color.
- Ensure that principals and teachers have professional development opportunities and coaching to help them assess their own cultural viewpoints and biases, set high expectations for all students, acknowledge diverse learning styles, use culturally responsive pedagogy, and effectively engage diverse families and community members.

## ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

- Clearly articulate racial justice and educational equity as a goal for your school and foster a school climate that encourages all educators to speak out, take action, and fiercely confront any racist thoughts, comments, and actions.
- Critically examine your own identity and privileges and how those have shaped your experiences and impacted the teaching and learning of students of color.
- Develop a long-term plan to build an anti-racist community by developing a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee within your leadership team, helping your staff identify biases and having open conversations about reducing and eliminating systemic bias in the school setting.
- Review curricula to make sure they are culturally and linguistically inclusive and examine school-level disaggregated data and policies on grading, discipline, and access and participation in advanced courses with the goal of rooting out inequities.
- Familiarize yourself with culturally responsive pedagogy, support teachers in their efforts to transform their teaching practices, and consider new teachers' knowledge and support of culturally responsive teaching in your hiring decisions.

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## ▶ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS—CONTINUED

- Facilitate discussions and professional learning opportunities on developing an anti-racist stance, structural racism, implicit bias, race, colorblindness, and equity with teachers, school counselors, school resource officers, and other staff.
- Develop relationships with families and community members, ensure that you and your staff speak or honor students' native languages, and create schedules and structures that allow families to authentically engage in school activities and decision making.
- Empower student voice and offer opportunities for all students to increase their awareness about race and privilege, discuss racist incidents respectfully, and evaluate systems that perpetuate oppression.
- Strengthen relationships with students of color to help you understand their school experience, relationships, levels of connectedness to adults in the building; and ensure students of color are represented in student leadership activities and advisory groups.

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