

# Eliminate Racism to Optimize Student Health and Learning

---

## *Position Brief*

### **SUMMARY**

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that systematic racism must be eliminated from the United States and this elimination can begin with school systems, school staff, families and children. Racism, a public health crisis, threatens the health, educational attainment, and well-being of children and adolescents. School systems hold a profound formative influence in the lives of students. Where racism exists, students of color experience adverse impacts on their health, well-being, and learning. Schools must be systems within communities where antiracism is the default culture and climate.

### **RATIONALE**

Racism exists when institutions and laws support attitudes or beliefs that discriminate with regards to individuals or groups on skin color or ethnicity (University of Kansas, 2014). Jones' (2000) theory presents three levels of racism

- 1) institutionalized, e.g., structural;
- 2) personally mediated, e.g., prejudice and discrimination; and
- 3) internalized, e.g., helplessness, hopelessness, and devaluing self.

All children and adolescents deserve to be supported as they develop and grow. Racism is a social determinant of health (Trent, et al., 2019). An example of the impact of racism is residential segregation that results in segregated schools that limit diversity and equity (Reardon, 2016). Psychosocial stress experienced by youth of color is associated with chronic disease, including behavioral disorders, and mental health conditions (Pachter, et al, 2018, Trent, et al., 2019).

To provide all students with an environment where they are healthy, safe, engaged, and challenged, a collaborative approach to health and learning must be in place (ASCD & CDC, 2014). NASN holds that to optimize student health, safety, and learning, students and adults in schools and school systems must model antiracist systems and behaviors. As school and community healthcare providers, school nurses advocate and act as change agents to support students and their families. School nurses and other school and school system staff individually assess their own explicit and implicit biases via partnerships with community providers and agencies. Cultivating change in schools and school systems include actions such as

- Review school policies and practices to uncover and eliminate racism, for example;
  - Examine relationship between racial achievement gaps and racial discipline gaps and propose interventions (Pearman et al., 2019)
  - Address racism in bullying and violence policies
- Advocate for system changes that celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion;

- Annually engage school staff on education on cultural diversity, discrimination and racism
- Hire and retain staff with diverse backgrounds
- Provide evidence-based curriculum that teaches students and families how to recognize implicit bias and address racism;
- Promote empathy by actively listening to lived experience of racism as told by students, families, colleagues, and community members;
- Improve student and teacher interactions to increase students sense of belonging and connectedness

## REFERENCES

ASCD & CDC. (2014). Whole school whole community whole child: A collaborative approach to learning and health. <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/wholechild/wsccl-a-collaborative-approach.pdf>

Jones, C.P. (2000). Levels of racism: A theoretic framework and a gardener's tale. *American Journal of Public Health, 90*(8), 1212-1215. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.90.8.1212>

Pachter, L.M., Caldwell, C.H., Jackson, J.S., & Bernstein, B.A. (2018). Discrimination and mental health in a representative sample of African American and Afro Caribbean youth. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, 5*(4): 831–837.

Pearman, F.A., Curran, C.F., Fisher, B., & Gardella, J. (2019). Are achievement gaps related to discipline gaps? Evidence from national data. *AERA Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419875440>

Reardon, S. (2016). School segregation and racial academic achievement gaps. *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences (5)* 34-57. <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2016.2.5.03>

Trent, M, Dooley, D.G., & Dougé, J. (2019). The Impact of racism on child and adolescent health. Section on Adolescent Health, Council on Community Pediatrics and Committee on Adolescence. *Pediatrics 144* (2) e20191765. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1765>

University of Kansas. (2014). Strategies and activities for reducing racial prejudice and racism. Community Toolbox. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/reduce-prejudice-racism/main>

Adopted: June 2020

Suggested citation: National Association of School Nurses. (2020). *Eliminate racism to optimize student health and learning* (Position brief). Silver Spring, MD: Author.

“To optimize student health, safety and learning, it is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that a professional registered school nurse is present in every school all day, every day.”

*All position briefs from the National Association of School Nurses will automatically expire 18 months after publication unless renewed and recommended for position statement or other NASN document development.*

---

[www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org)  
National Association of School Nurses  
1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 925  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
1-240-821-1130