



The School Counselor's Role in Constructing Antiracist Schools

A Position Paper of the Missouri School Counselor Association

The Missouri School Counselor Association's Position

The Missouri School Counselor Association (MSCA) acknowledges and stands against the systemic racism that exists to oppress Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). MSCA has chosen to use the term "BIPOC" because it centers the experiences of Black and Indigenous people who have been uniquely affected by white supremacy and colonization (Steward, 2019). This work begins with individual school counselors who must examine their own internal and unconscious biases in order to effectively address them in others. MSCA specifically calls for school counselors to help create safe and antiracist environments for all students and groups in the school community. MSCA is committed to examining its own policies, practices, programming, leadership structure, and the demographic make-up of its leaders and members to address the racist elements that may exist within them.

Rationale

The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Dion Johnson, and Tony McDade are tragic reminders that racism is embedded within our justice system and therefore extends to all other systems throughout our country. Our education system is no exception; many are outraged and hurt by these tragic deaths and the inability to continue being willfully ignorant as a result, but the BIPOC groups targeted are uniquely and often viscerally affected by them. School counselors must examine the roots of systemic oppression within our schools, districts, and professional associations, analyze how these conditions perpetuate persistent gaps in achievement, opportunity, and attainment for BIPOC students, and advocate for necessary changes to address them.

The ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) call for school counselors to be "advocates, leaders, collaborators and consultants who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success" (p. 1). Systemic racism that oppresses BIPOC is emotionally and mentally harmful to our students. In addition, the benefits of viewing diversity as a strength are shared by all students, not just students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Childs, 2019; Choi, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Nieto, 2013). As advocates, especially for students

from diverse backgrounds, school counselors are ethically obligated and morally compelled to interrupt these racist systems.

Social justice and racial equity efforts are often cloaked in terms that are more palatable for white audiences (Case & Ngo, 2017; Kendi, 2019). MSCA intentionally focuses on *antiracism*, defined as policies, procedures, and practices that create systems that actively combat insidious forces that oppress Black, Indigenous and People of Color and privilege white people (Kendi, 2019; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019). MSCA asserts that it is no longer acceptable to simply be “not racist.” “Not racist” actions more palatable to white audiences include avoiding the use of racist terms, treating people equally without regard for race or ethnicity, and celebrating cultural diversity in one’s school. An antiracist approach takes proactive actions to reduce racial inequities that exist in all major institutions, including education. Race-neutral policies that do not seek to redress racial inequity are still racist policies (Kendi, 2019) and do not effectively mitigate gaps in achievement, opportunity, and attainment for BIPOC students (Swanson & Welton, 2019; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2019).

MSCA believes that focusing on the implicit biases of educators is an important way to actively combat the willful ignorance, bias, and racism against BIPOC that prevents equitable opportunity and promotes injustice in school systems. Eberhardt (2019) notes that “teachers commonly perceive Black students to have more negative demeanors and a longer history of misbehavior than whites” and “Black students are more likely than others to be labeled “troublemakers” after a few minor indiscretions” (p. 214). Upon acknowledging implicit bias, real work in building relationships with students and practicing empathy can begin to change the narrative where systemic racism in schools is concerned. MSCA and its members cannot expect teachers to acknowledge their own implicit biases and practice empathy if school counselors themselves haven’t taken that step to help all students feel safe and succeed in school.

The School Counselor’s Role in Antiracism Education

The role of school counselors in creating safe and antiracist school communities can be divided into three domains: work school counselors must do themselves to identify and mitigate implicit biases they may hold, the work they will do to help their school community identify racist policies and practices that must be addressed, and efforts they must take to address racist policies and practices in their professional organizations, including MSCA.

Individual School Counselors

To authentically engage in the work needed to advocate for antiracist schools, districts, and professional associations, MSCA asserts that all school counselors must first identify, examine, and mitigate their own biases and prejudices about BIPOC students. This work is necessary in order to recognize the interconnectedness of sections of their own identities and to begin to consider the impact of that interconnectedness on their willingness to be complicit concerning systemic racism. MSCA calls for all school counselors to:

- Schedule and engage in regularly recurring independent (e.g., reading culturally relevant books, listening to podcasts, watching documentaries, etc.) and community-based professional development (e.g., training provided by nonprofit organizations focused on racial equity and inclusion, etc.) understanding:
 - Their own personal biases and prejudices concerning race and justice in America and henceforth foster greater respect for and better relationships with BIPOC students and families;
 - Antiracism best practices;
 - The intersectionality of various aspects of people's identity, some that are historically marginalized and some that procure privilege (Crenshaw, 1991); and,
 - Other relevant topics that support the deconstruction of systemic racism in schools and communities as these topics evolve and understanding of them grows.

- Advocate for antiracism professional development opportunities within schools, districts, and professional associations.

- Consult with BIPOC colleagues, especially when the cultural background of students with whom the school counselor is working differs from her/his own.

School and District

The American School Counselor Association (2016) calls for school counselors to be advocates for systemic change by bringing equity and access to schools where they work. As it relates to creating antiracist school systems, the school counselor should lead through participation in district and school initiatives that seek to mitigate systemic racism and create antiracist school policies and educational systems. MSCA encourages school counselors to:

- Provide leadership and resources to advocate for policies, procedures, and actions that help create school communities that are antiracist and support BIPOC.
- Collaborate with district and building administration to amend procedures and resources that are race-neutral and fail to actively support BIPOC in schools and in the school counseling program.
- Advocate for school counseling program policies, resources, and practices that acknowledge BIPOC, and provide equitable opportunity for increased awareness and access to appropriate resources and support systems.
- Promote cultural competence in the school community to help create school counseling programs that are antiracist, safe, inclusive, and welcoming.
- Advocate for the hiring of BIPOC in all positions, including school and district leaders, to increase representation of BIPOC at the building and district levels to ensure that all students are provided equitable opportunities to learn.
- Advocate for learning materials and resources in all content areas that promote the diversity and inclusion of BIPOC, address ways BIPOC have been harmed and oppressed, and consider the impact that white supremacy and inequitable learning opportunities have had and continue to have on American society.

School Counseling Profession and Professional Organizations

Professional associations like MSCA offer important opportunities for school counselors to receive relevant and timely updates and professional development and play an important role in advocacy for the profession. In order to be authentic in advocacy efforts to build antiracist schools and districts in which stakeholders have examined their own biases and prejudices, MSCA must hold itself accountable to these same ideals.

Therefore, MSCA commits to the following:

- Acknowledging, in words and actions, that Black Lives Matter, and imbuing this ideal in MSCA's work;
- Examining the policies, procedures, and practices of the organization to identify racist elements and transforming them into antiracist ones;
- Advocating for open and culturally competent dialogue about social justice and racial equity with various stakeholders; and,
- Prioritize actions that enhance the demographic makeup of the membership and leaders reflects that of school counselors state-wide.

Further, MSCA calls for

- The development of standards that specifically address implicit bias, antiracism, and equitable opportunities for BIPOCs in school systems and beyond;
- Continued professional development opportunities for school counselors on antiracism -- including related but often contentious topics such as white privilege, power, and oppression -- on an individual and systemic basis;
- The inclusion of equity and access measures in program evaluation methods (i.e. the Internal Improvement Review); and,
- Ongoing review of data to ensure that ASCA and MSCA recognition programs provide equitable access to majority-BIPOC schools.

Summary

MSCA strongly opposes systemic racism that pervades systems such as healthcare, criminal justice, and education. MSCA stands with BIPOC and supports antiracist policies and practices that deconstruct those which do not mitigate harm caused by racist and race-neutral stances. School counselors must perpetually examine their biases and prejudices as advocates for antiracist practices in their schools, districts, and within the profession and professional organizations, including MSCA. MSCA believes the profession should influence its members to be advocates for systemic change by seeking individual personal and professional development, and through purposeful efforts that support BIPOC as we deliver comprehensive school counseling program components. By leveraging the skills and experience of school counselors, MSCA believes it can mitigate the harm caused by systemic racism to BIPOC students and work to prevent further actions that support white supremacy and race-neutrality within the school system and beyond.

References and Resources

- American School Counselor Association (ASCA). (2016). *Ethical standards for school counselors*. Author.
- Case, A., & Ngo, B. (2017). "Do we have to call it that?" The response of neoliberal multiculturalism to college antiracism efforts. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 19(4), 215-222.
- Childs, D. J. (2019). She can't teach us: Exploring the complexities of diversifying the US teaching force. *Educational Studies*, 55(2), 114–120.
<https://doi-org.proxy.library.umkc.edu/10.1080/00131946.2018.1559844>
- Choi, J. H., Meisenheimer, J. M., McCart, A. B., & Sailor, W. (2017). Improving learning for all students through equity-based inclusive reform practices: Effectiveness of a fully integrated schoolwide model on student reading and math achievement. *Remedial and Special Education*, 38(1), 28–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932516644054>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Eberhardt, J. L. (2019). *Biased: Uncovering the hidden prejudice that shapes what we see, think, and do*. Penguin Random House, LLC.
- Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. One World.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). *Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). Somerset, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Nieto, S. (2013). *Finding joy in teaching students of diverse backgrounds: Culturally responsive and socially just practices in U.S. classrooms*. Heinemann.
- Steward, D. L. (2019). Envisioning possibilities for innovations in higher education research on race and ethnicity. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, 5(1), 7-32.
- Swanson, J., & Welton, A. (2019). When good intentions only go so far: White principals leading discussions about race. *Urban Education*, 54(5), 732–759.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918783825>
- Wiggin, G., & Watson-Vandiver, M. J. (2019). Urban school success: Lessons from a high-achieving urban school, and students' reactions to Ferguson, Missouri. *Education & Urban Society*, 51(8), 1074–1105. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.umkc.edu/10.1177/0013124517751721>

Adopted: 2020

Next Revision Date: 2023