



BECOMING AN ANTI-RACIST SCHOOL COUNSELOR

California Association of School Counselors
Social Justice, Equity, & Anti-Racism Committee



WELCOME

School counselors play a key role in the school community as advocates for all students to provide equitable access through comprehensive school counseling programs. Equitable comprehensive school counseling includes self-awareness of personal biases and collaboration with all stakeholders to actively work toward being anti-racist and creating an action plan that is inclusive for all students. The action plan may include providing staff professional development on equity, teaching classroom lessons on racism, creating a culturally inclusive space, highlighting student cultures, and having courageous conversations. The California Association of School Counselors (CASC) is committed to providing insight on how to be an anti-racist school counselor. This guide provides strategies and resources to implement as an anti-racist school counselor with an inclusive program.

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Reader Tip:

For definition of key words, please visit the Terminology section on page 14. Sources are hyperlinked within the guide, as well as in the References section on page 15.





SELF AWARENESS OF OWN BIAS

The best place for school counselors to start their anti-racist work is to reflect upon and build self-awareness on their own biases. According to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, everyone can be susceptible to implicit bias, defined as “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats et al., 2016, p. 14). These unconscious associations have been formed from one’s upbringing, experiences, and observations of the media, all of which are often beyond one’s control. It is important that school counselors not only recognize that they have an implicit bias that may contradict their intent or values, but also that these biases do play a role in how decisions are made in the education setting and how students are treated on a micro and macro level. By building this self-awareness, school counselors are better able to identify when their biases may influence their actions and develop a critical lens for the causes of disparities within education. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity has created a free online [Implicit Bias Training](#), consisting of four short modules; this is a great starting point for any educator and/or staff to build an understanding of implicit bias. Another great resource to help educators reflect on their own implicit bias is the [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\)](#), created by Harvard University’s Project Implicit research team. Project Implicit offers a variety of IAT, including tests on race, gender, religion, disability, and age. The results from these tests and ongoing self-reflection may bring up feelings of discomfort and vulnerability; however, this self-awareness will lay a strong foundation for one’s commitment to equity and social justice, as anti-racist school counselors.



LEARN & COLLABORATE WITH SCHOOL STAFF

School counselors play a role in creating a safe and equitable space for their students, through collaboration. Culturally competent collaboration is described as school counselors and stakeholders working together to develop programming that seeks, values, and respects the cultural wisdom and strengths of all parties involved (Grothaus & Johnson, 2012). The acronym, POWER² (Grothaus & Johnson, 2012) is a helpful tool to use when considering different steps for collaboration.

- P- Pursue possible collaborators: Initiate relationships with potential collaborators who have diverse cultural identities.
 - Example: Join your district's Anti-Racist task force, and if your district does not have one, invite some of your colleagues to draft a proposal to site or district leadership.
- O- Opportunity: Identify opportunities to collaborate, especially around equity issues.
 - Example: Form a book study with a group of colleagues. There are [resources](#) available through the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) with tools for group discussions.
- W- Work: Work together to establish common goals and discuss shared interests.
 - Example: Identify policies and practices that have been inequitable by looking at data and discussing it as a department, using a cycle of inquiry.
- E- Empower: Invite and encourage collaborator empowerment by seeking and honoring one another's expertise and cultural wisdom.
 - Example: This could be done through setting meeting norms and sharing roles during meetings and professional development. This helps set a safe space for everyone to share and collaborate.
- R²- Relationship building and reporting progress and results: Continue to enhance the relationship.
 - Example: Share out your department's work on equity with your advisory board or through newsletters to families. This will not only celebrate the work the department is committed to, but also support relationship building with stakeholders.

ASK STUDENTS WHAT THEY NEED

Asking students what they need is an excellent way to support ALL students while being an anti-racist school counselor. Social injustice affects individuals in various ways. Often, educators assume that they know what their students need. When dealing with traumatic events, student experiences are different. Thus, students need varying levels of support. To properly support students, school counselors must ask students what they need in a way that is developmentally appropriate. Asking students what they need helps school counselors build rapport and relationships, while avoiding any retraumatization of students and families.

One key strategy in helping students process traumatic events, such as social injustice or racism, is to provide them with a place and space to express their feelings. School counselors can do this by asking students the following questions:

- What is your understanding of what happened?
- What have you thought of since the incident?
- Can you identify any other trusted adults to support you?
- What would help you feel better?

These questions can be asked in person or remotely. Postcards, phone calls, and text messages are excellent ways to connect with students and families. Google Forms can be used to create needs assessments and digital check-in forms to regularly connect with students. Asking students, families, and communities what they need is a great way to build allyship and collaboration.





CREATING A CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE SPACE

For many students of diverse backgrounds, the school counseling office is a necessary safe space. In order for school counselors to create a safe space, they first need to examine if their space is culturally inclusive for all students. A culturally inclusive space includes the following actions to provide visibility as an ally:

- Learn students' names and the correct pronunciation of their names. Correctly pronouncing a student's name is a sign of respect for them and their families. If counselors are unaware of how to pronounce their name, simply ask the student how to pronounce it. This small conversation can leave a big impact on the student and establish a sense of safety and comfort within the counseling relationship.
- Connect with students' parents and families. For some diverse communities, reaching out for support can be a difficult task. School counselors can build the bridge between the school and family by sharing support. It is also important to have services translated in order to eliminate any language barriers.
- Display culturally inclusive décor such as posters that signify unity and inclusion. The posters can contain people of different races, ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, religions, and abilities. Furthermore, many students express themselves creatively and school counselors can display their artwork in their own spaces.
- Display and use diverse and inclusive books within the counseling office. Do the books symbolize characters from diverse backgrounds and communities? Are the authors of the books from diverse backgrounds? Having diverse literature can display representation for many students. For other students, these stories can be used as an opportunity to learn more about different cultures and traditions. [Covid19k12counseling.org](https://www.covid19k12counseling.org) contains book lists and resources for youth of all ages.

ACKNOWLEDGE RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY

ASCA's Ethical Standards for School Counselors provide a solid ground for school counselors to stand on when acknowledging racism and White supremacy. The ASCA ethical standard A.10 states that "School counselors as justice advocates support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and consult when their competence level requires additional support." Furthermore, ASCA's position statement, "The School Counselor and Equity for All Students," states that school counselors develop and implement a school counseling program that promotes equity and access for students.

Creating anti-racist spaces includes acknowledging racism and White supremacy through a thorough review of the counseling department's mission and vision. Identify if the vision and mission statements take a stance against systemic racism and White supremacy, and consider revising the statements to be more inclusive and equitable.

Take time to have this conversation as a department. In an ASCA [webinar](#) titled "Interrupting Racism: Race & Equity in your Program," some of the suggestions to start this conversation include:

- Watch the Ted Talk titled "Reality Pedagogy" by Christopher Emdin as a department and discuss takeaways and reflections as a team.
- Be a part of meetings with teachers to discuss the curriculum and what students are learning in their classes.
- Regularly read articles about race and equity as part of your practice.
- Consistently include issues of race when discussing data.
- Engage in learning, either through videos, books, or webinars.

There are several resources available to school counselors to learn about racism and White supremacy. A great resource available for free through ASCA is the ASCA U Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist training. Going through this as a department will encourage conversations about racism and White supremacy and enable a more comprehensive, equitable and inclusive school counseling program.





TEACHING RACE AND PROMOTING DIVERSITY

For many educators, teaching race issues to students can be a difficult task. Some might feel uncomfortable or may not know how to begin. However, staying silent or steering clear from this topic could feed into racial disparities and divisions that are deeply rooted in our country. It is the school counselor's responsibility to address these issues and learn how to feel comfortable in promoting equity.

Although the school environment should be designed as a safe space for all students, there may be some students who do not feel comfortable or included. To address this issue, school counselors can discuss the topic of race within their classroom instruction. Students can learn the terms: race, racism, diversity, prejudice, discrimination, and privilege and the impacts of each for individuals and communities. These lessons can provide examples of discrimination and how to be an ally to those affected by racism. If talking about race brings about feelings of discomfort, visit Learning for Justice's guide, ["Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism, and Other Difficult Topics with Students"](#).

Students can also learn about race or ethnicity through lessons representative of their own identities and cultures. Representation matters in a school's curriculum, as it provides visibility to the school's multicultural students. School counselors can begin to implement diversity into their lessons by first looking at their curriculum map of the year. Consider the many diverse role models that can instill hope in students. For example, during important cultural-themed months or holidays, school counselors can highlight important historical figures that have made a difference in their communities. Such individuals may have demonstrated character traits that can be tied into a character education program. ASCA created a list of [National & Educational Awareness dates](#) for school counselors to keep track of events throughout the year.



CELEBRATING STUDENTS' CULTURES

Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides an essential avenue for school counselors to celebrate diversity and cultures within their comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors can focus on self-awareness and inclusion as Tier 1 support for all students. This would look like providing schoolwide lessons or activities for students to engage with developing a deeper understanding various cultures. In addition, SEL lessons are a great place to introduce books and authors that focus on celebrating diverse culture and discussing race issues. SEL is a wonderful way to help students celebrate the uniqueness of various countries and cultures.

Another way school counselors can help celebrate students' cultures is by organizing and hosting special school-wide events and activities. Events such as Mix-It-Up at Lunch Day help students celebrate culture while teaching acceptance and inclusion. School counselors can also celebrate students' cultures by sponsoring cultural clubs and groups on campus. Cultural clubs are an excellent way to promote culture, diversity, and inclusion while allowing students to be active members of the student body. School counselors can look for allies and school staff to help share, co-chair and collaborate on these projects.

The ASCA's Awareness Date Calendar is an excellent tool to help plan for cultural events, lessons, and activities. The dates can be highlighted and shared with the site administration during the Annual Administrative Conference at the beginning of the school year.

HOST STUDENT VOICE PANELS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Students can teach adults considerably about culture, empathy, and equity. CASEL's SEL Roadmap to Reopening encourages the practice of including student voices as an essential vehicle for self-awareness, self-management, and social relationships not only for student-student relationships but student-teacher and teacher-student relationships as well. When students are afforded the opportunity to be viewed as an "expert," their self-confidence soars and enthusiasm for engagement increases. School counselors are encouraged to lead in the development of "Student Voice Panels" because they have fostered relationships with their student body. Follow these steps in order to develop an informative and enlightening opportunity for faculty, families, school board, and community members.

- Recruit students by explaining the need and how their voice matters. Explain the idea of a Student Voice Panel and what their participation will require. Explain that the student's participation is a valuable community service and therefore school counselors and/or the school's principal may provide a letter of recommendation for scholarships or whatever is most appropriate for the situation and grade level.
- Brainstorm questions with adults and students by sharing a Google Document and have face-to-face meetings if possible.
- Provide the co-constructed questions to the panel of students well before the event.
- Ask students for suggestions about a moderator for the event. They may ask for an adult or they may indicate a preference for a student to moderate the questions.
- Summarize the event with students a few days after the event. What went well? What was challenging? How did they feel during the event and how did they feel after the event? Ask if they might be open to participating in a Student Voice Panel for the student body.
- Be sure to write a thank-you note to students. It may be helpful to write a thank-you note from the lens of a scholarship provider as students will most likely want to use the letter to support scholarship applications. Writing another thank you note to the student's family helps to promote relationships and may encourage families to become more involved with the school/district. Mail the thank you note home and if possible provide a gift card or student store item.



RESPECTING DIFFERENCES & BUILDING EMPATHY

According to the ASCA position statement on the school counselor and cultural diversity, school counselors play a significant role in campus climate and must collaborate with all stakeholders to embrace and promote cultural diversity for the academic, career, and social-emotional success of all students (American School Counselor Association, 2016). Teaching students and training staff to respect differences and build empathy to broaden one's perspective are essential to anti-racist counseling.

Creating school environments, where all students feel empowered to be their whole selves, involves implementing opportunities for students to engage in discussions and activities where they are exposed to different experiences. Not only is it critical for students to be exposed to those experiences, but school counselors must then lead the school with practices that encourage and teach students to hold different experiences with respect to the school's mission for all students to thrive. Learning for Justice has a number of lessons that focus on justice and equality that can be used in classroom lessons to engage students in the necessary self-reflection of exploring their own biases, observing their community and their own uniqueness. Self-reflection and increased awareness of one's own biases and prejudices allows for a stronger ability to empathize (Fairman, 2016). Teaching empathy allows students to see the world from different perspectives. Social-emotional learning curriculum and books that focus on empathy are great tools to invoke thought and discussion on seeing the world from a different perspective. Just as these principles are expected for students, staff must be trained in respecting differences and building empathy. Utilizing courageous conversations during staff meetings, in the classroom, or during meetings increase one's sense of empathy and opportunity to respect differences. In addition, training on restorative circles to implement more open dialogue, provides opportunities for students and staff to grow in respect of differences for those in the school community.



COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

The American School Counselor Association states that one of the roles of a school counselor is to advocate to promote equity and access for all students by connecting their school counseling program to the school's academic mission and school improvement plan. In being advocates that promote equity and access for students, school counselors will have to participate in courageous conversations.

In doing anti-racist work, school counselors must remember that not every member of a school community may not have the same vision when trying to push the needle forward to have an anti-racist school community. Therefore, we can be the individuals that have courageous conversations with key stakeholders. The intent of having a courageous conversation is to look forward to putting action in place and creating a solution, they are not intended to be used as a conversation that places blame. Through these courageous conversations, the goal is to speak the truth, be transparent, and vulnerable. When approaching the development of an anti-racist school counseling program, think of any barriers, roadblocks, or perspectives that need to be taken into account. These are the individuals that school counselors can begin to have these courageous conversations with, to decide on how to start the work of developing anti-racist programs and create effective change for the students and school community.



EQUITY AUDIT & ACTION PLAN

Equity audits identify inequities in engagement, opportunity, academic, discipline, and attendance data. Engagement is important to monitor because students who become disengaged are more likely to fail in school and drop out (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). Examine the percentage of your Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students involved in clubs and extracurricular activities? Examples of opportunity data include access to rigorous coursework and high-quality academic support. Thoroughly analyze practices, and policies that influence inequities and disrupt systemic decisions that historically have disenfranchised BIPOC students. Share data disparities with your school community and use stories to humanize the data. Engage in dialogue about the academic resources, policies, grading, and discipline practices that are perpetuating inequities. Identify whom the practices and policies benefit and whom they disadvantage. Assess whether students of color are disproportionately affected negatively by disciplinary, pedagogical, and administrative practices. Furthermore, assess which students are most disciplined based on dress code or physical appearance and if a particular "rule" is applied to all people or just to some. Once the inequities have been identified, develop an action plan, in collaboration with stakeholders, to address them.

UTILIZE STRENGTH-BASED MODELS

It is important for school counselors to move away from a deficit-based narrative that describes students of color as high-risk, at-risk, underprepared, or unmotivated to an asset-based narrative. Deficit-based narratives are problem-focused and ask, “what is missing in the student that I must go find?” Alternatively, school counselors must focus on an asset-based narrative, one that asks, “What is present in the student that they can build upon?” Discovering and affirming these underutilized assets are essential to an asset-based approach. The Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) offers a counter framework to the deficit-based narrative. It shifts the center of focus from notions of White, middle-class culture to the cultures of Communities of Color. The six forms of cultural capital that have been identified within Communities of Color and are described below.

- **Aspirational Capital:** The hopes and dreams that motivate students even in the face of barriers. School counselors can create classroom lessons that focus on goal setting and the benefits of postsecondary education.
- **Familial Capital:** The social and personal resources you have from your family. Aspirational capital is often shaped by family members, as such school counselors should actively work to build relationships with students’ families and create a campus culture that invites families into the educational process rather than excludes.
- **Social Capital:** The students’ network of people and community resources. School counselors can help connect students to extracurricular activities, clubs, mentors, and expand their social networks in the school community.
- **Navigational Capital:** The students’ skills and abilities to navigate “social institutions,” including educational spaces. School counselors can help students build navigational capital, particularly during times of transition to middle school, high school, and postsecondary education. This can include topics such as how to manage multiple teacher expectations in middle school, high school graduation requirements, A-G requirements, postsecondary options, and financial aid.
- **Resistant Capital** refers to students’ ability to advocate and secure their rights to education and to challenge the status quo. The sources of this form of capital come from parents, community members and a historical legacy of engaging in social justice. School counselors can help students identify self-advocacy skills and simultaneously work to remove systemic barriers that impede.
- **Linguistic Capital** refers to the various language and communication skills students have obtained as a result of experiencing more than one language and/or communication style. It recognizes that students arrive at school with multiple language and communication styles (e.g., art, music, poetry, storytelling). Students who are still learning English may need extra support to build this wealth. School counselors can help by utilizing culturally responsive materials, developing multi-lingual resources, and making it clear that the students’ first language is a strength and asset.

TERMINOLOGY

- **Anti-Racism:** Anti-Racism is actively working against racism. It is making a commitment to resisting unjust laws, policies, and racist attitudes.
- **Bias:** Your personal preference for, or against, an individual or group. It can interfere with your judgment.
- **Culture:** The sum of inter-generationally transmitted lifestyles, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns, and products of a people that involve their language, music, art, artifacts, history, eating preferences, customs, and social rules.
- **Dominant Culture:** The group of people in society who hold the most power and are often (but not always) in the majority. In the US: people who are white, middle class, Christian, and cisgender are the dominant culture. They are in charge of the institutions and have established behaviors, values, and traditions that are considered acceptable and the “norm” for our countries.
- **Implicit Bias:** Attitudes or stereotypes that unconsciously affect our actions, decisions, and understanding.
- **Microaggression:** A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.
- **Prejudice:** An attitude towards an individual or group of folx based on the social group they belong to. Prejudices can be based on stereotypes, misinformation, or fear, and while they are not always negative- they most often are. It is the personal side of racism.
- **Racism:** Prejudice or discrimination against an individual or group, based on race. When prejudice and power are combined, it results in racism.
- **Stereotype:** A common oversimplified and/or distorted view of a person, thing, group, etc. that is not based on any fact.
- **Systemic Racism:** Racism that is embedded and reinforced throughout a whole system or institution over the course of time, oppressing a racial group to the social, political, and economic advantage of another group. Systemic racism results in disparities and inequities across different groups.



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A SPECIAL THANK YOU

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Below are the following individuals who contributed to the content of the guide.

Brandon Castro
Dr. Elin Peinado Cervantes
Christiana Cobb-Dozier
Tiffany Le
Dr. Caroline Lopez-Perry
Becky Love
Dr. Rebecca Pianta
Marina Scates
LaShonda Tillmon

