

# Reducing racial disproportionality in discipline using the Disproportionality in Discipline Assessment for Schools (DDAS)

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**SMART**  
School Mental Health Assessment  
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**SEATTLE  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**

“This past spring, the archivist for Seattle Public Schools unearthed a yellowed slip of paper that C.S. Barbo, former principal of Meany Junior High, had tucked into a time capsule in 1963.

In three brief paragraphs, Barbo lamented what he called the “cultural, racial and economic disadvantages” that he believed slowed the learning of some of his students.

“If this box is ever opened,” his letter reads, “I would assume the problems we face today in understanding the racial differences will have been resolved. Personally, I trust this will happen.””

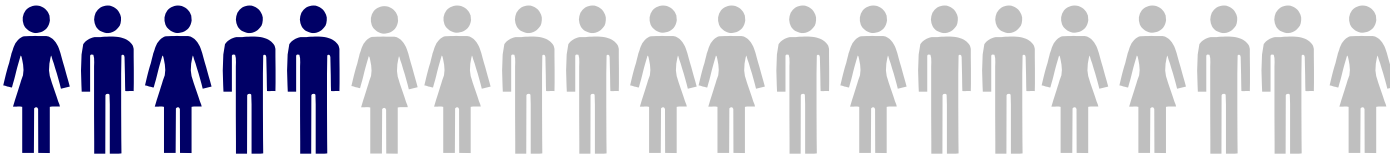
--Morton, N., *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 12, 2018

# What is racial disproportionality in discipline?

“Disciplined”



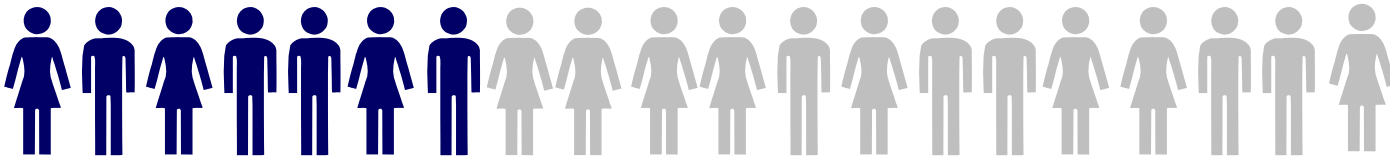
Racial group 1



20 students  
5 disciplined  
 $(20/5)*100 =$

**25%**

Racial group 2



20 students  
7 disciplined  
 $(20/7)*100 =$

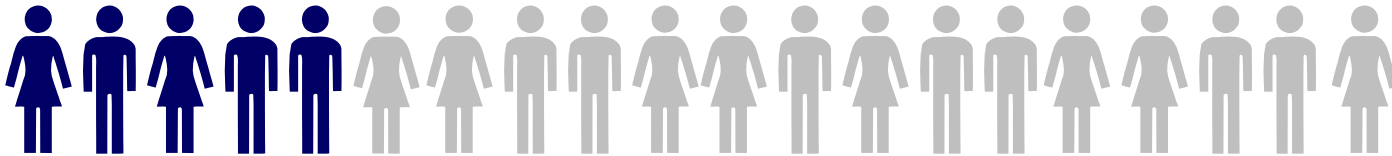
**35%**

# Is this disproportional?

“Disciplined”



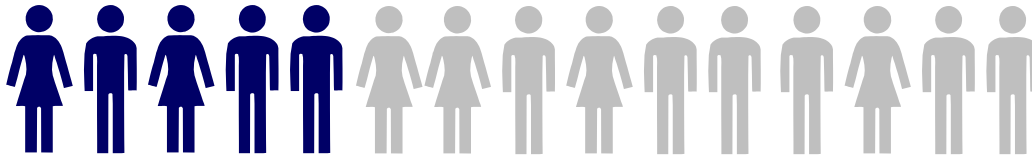
Racial group 1



20 students  
5 disciplined  
 $(20/5)*100 =$

**25%**

Racial group 2



15 students  
5 disciplined  
 $(15/5)*100 =$

**33%**

# Is this disproportional?

“Disciplined”

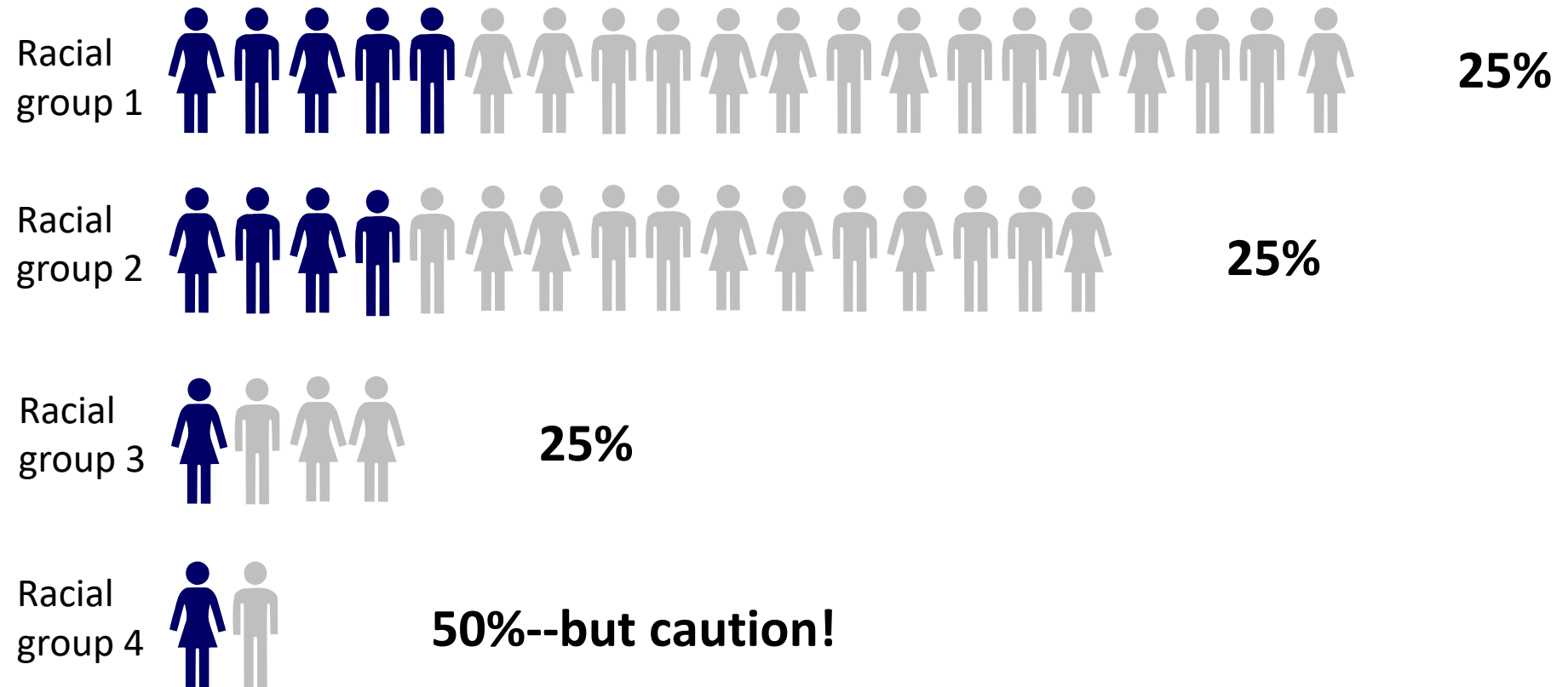
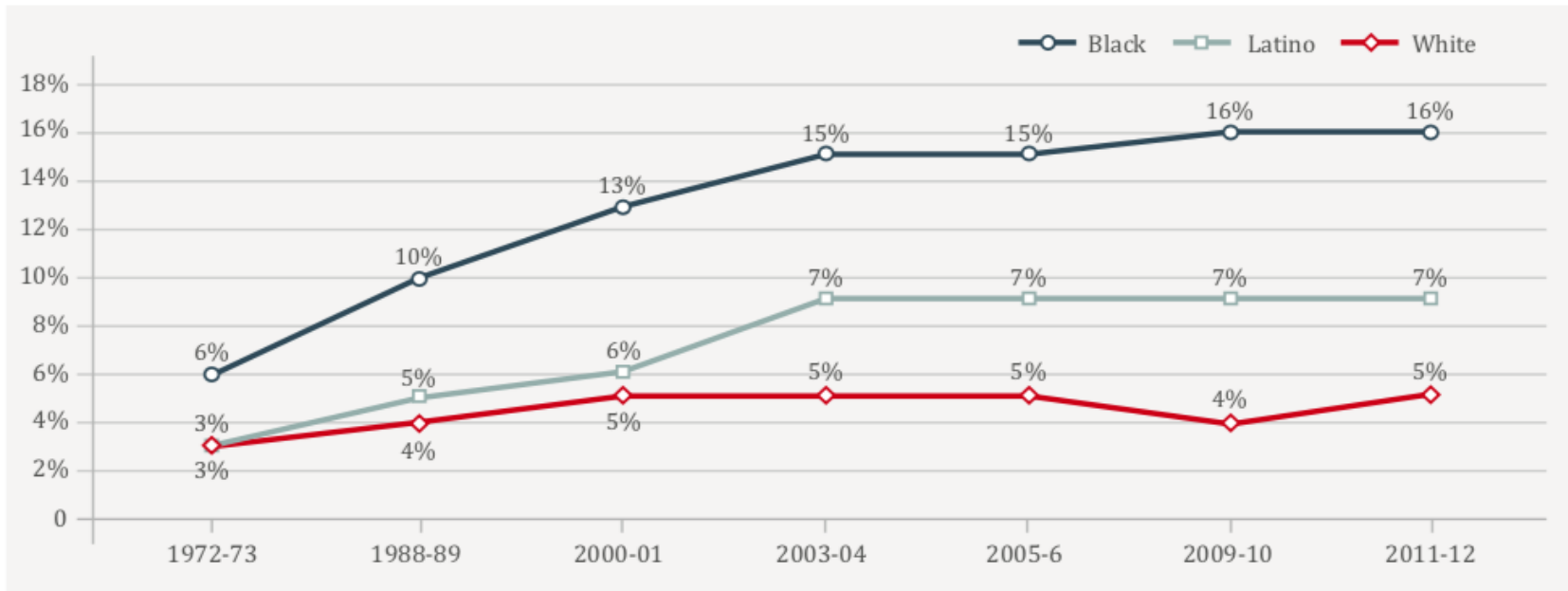


Figure 2. Suspension Rates over Time by Race/Ethnicity, K-12<sup>9</sup>



Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights

## The challenge

Most teachers, school leadership, and administrators feel deeply concerned about disproportionality

BUT

Few feel like they know what to do about it

# Disclaimer

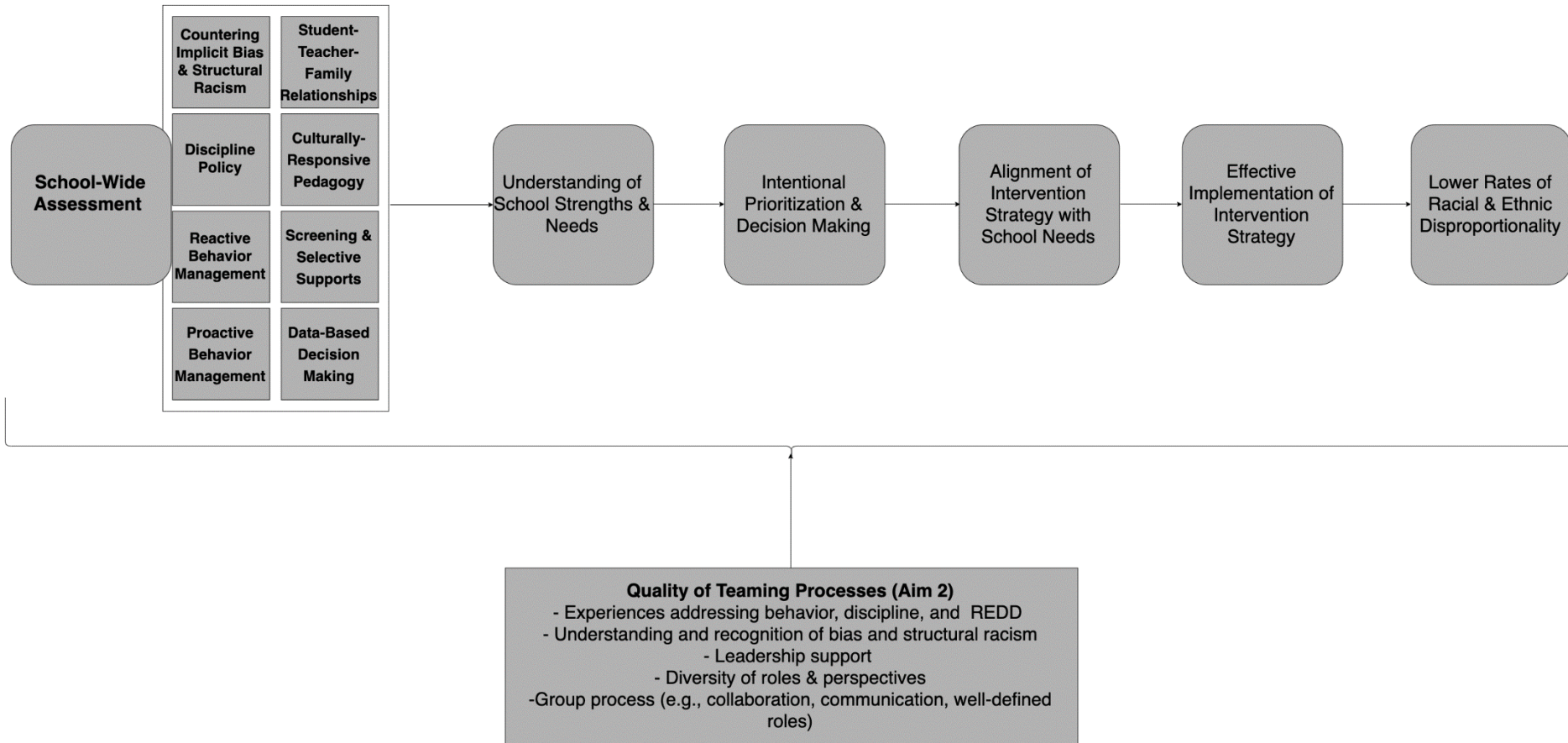
- Race is a social construction
- Race does not equal culture or socioeconomic status
- While race is strongly associated with life experiences, no group is monolithic
- Researchers often study disproportionality using race in a comparative framework—e.g. comparing all other races against white
  - We acknowledge this is problematic, as it reifies white hegemony



## Key strengths of DDAS theory of change

- **Intentional & Logical**—no random acts of intervention!  
Activities are designed to be:
  - Based on *need* as well as *feasibility*
  - *Feasible*—implementable, minimizes resistance and maximizes staff buy-in, focuses on bite-sized chunks
  - Logically *connected* to desired outcomes
- **Evidence-based/evidence-informed**
- **Multicomponent**—no quick solutions, easy answers, or “silver bullets”

# DDAS Theory of Change



# DDAS Components



Program  
Assessment

Reflection &  
Prioritization

Assessment-  
to- Action  
Menu

## DDAS Program Review Self-assessment

School teams (Racial Equity Teams, PBIS teams, School Leadership teams) rate themselves on several items within each of the 8 factors on a three point scale—1 = Not in place, 2 = Needs Improvement, 3 = In place

Items were generated by our team and drawn from schoolwide assessment measures such as the SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory

Teams develop consensus scores, a process of discussion and debate among team members

# Racial Bias and Structural Racism

Explicit and implicit racial bias are associations that one makes between certain racial groups and personal characteristics that are primed by pervasive and systemic stereotypes encountered in society. Racial bias impacts educators; interpretation of and reaction to student behavior, ability to build strong relationships, expectations for students' academic success and socio-emotional competencies, and responsiveness in instruction and classroom management. These biases have been associated with student outcomes, including academic achievement and discipline.

## **Example items:**

- New domain – no current items.

Citations: Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; Gilliam et al., 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Halberstadt et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2015; Papageorge et al., 2018 ; Peterson et al., 2016; van den Bergh et al., 2010

# Screening & Selective Supports

Teacher referral is the most common procedure for disciplinary action or recommendation for supports, but is vulnerable to subjective bias. Often, students of color are referred to punitive discipline while their white counterparts are referred to counselors and other supportive services at disproportionate rates. Consistent, race-neutral methods to identify students who are struggling with behavioral and emotional problems and refer them to supportive services.

## **Example items:**

- The school screens or assesses social, behavioral, emotional, and academic needs of students using culturally relevant screens.

Citations: Chafouleas, Kilgus, & Wallach, 2010; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Gresham, 2005; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Horner, & Walker, 2000; Kilgus, Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & Welsh, 2012; Severson, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill, & Gresham, 2007; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008;

# Discipline Policy

Effective discipline policy considers the situation and the function or reason underlying a student's behavior in order to develop an effective response. Zero-tolerance discipline policy and punitive procedures are often associated with racial and ethnic disproportionality.

## Example items:

- Discipline procedures focus on alternatives to exclusion and emphasize teaching prosocial skills

Citations: APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Cornell & Sheras, 2006; Cornell, Maeng, Huang, Shukla, & Konold, 2018; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Fenning et al., 2008; Gregory, 2018; Hoffmann, 2014; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Olweus & Limber, 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 1999;

# Proactive Behavior Management

Proactive behavior management involves setting clear expectations and recognition systems so that students know what behavior is considered acceptable. It also involve designing engaging classroom structures that focus students on learning. Many or most teachers have not received substantive training in evidence-based practices for proactively managing student behavior and, thus, are vulnerable to using reactive practices.

## **Example items:**

- Students' cultures are considered when designing behavioral expectations and recognition systems

Citations: Bal, 2016; Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014; Bal, Schrader, Afacan, & Mawene, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Cook et al., 2018; Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018; Swain-Bradway et al., 2014



# Reactive Behavior Management

Racial disparities are also perpetrated in the moment when an individual educator decides a) that a behavior requires disciplining and b) which disciplinary action should be implemented as a response to the incident. Extant research has demonstrated that Black and Latinx youth receive more exclusionary discipline consequences for mild and moderate offences, and that race remains a significant predictor of the severity of a disciplinary action regardless of the severity of the misbehavior.

## **Example items:**

- School staff try to understand the root cause of a behavior and provide skills instruction, rather than relying solely on punishment.

Citations: Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McCadden, 1998; Monroe, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; Owens & McLanahan, 2019; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, & Huges, 2014; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002

# Data-based Decision Making

Data about disciplinary actions are often collected in multiple ways, but may not always be used to inform decision making to reduce disproportionality. By disaggregating disciplinary data, schools can identify the places (e.g. cafeteria, classrooms), people, and events that are most contributing to disproportionality.

## **Example items:**

- Discipline data reports are disaggregated by race

Citations: Blake, Gregory, James, & Hasan, 2016; Bonesheski & Runge, 2014; Gilbert, 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017; McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, 2018; McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014; McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, & Frank, 2013; Nakasato, 2000; Osher et al., 2015; Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2014; Scott, Hirn, & Barber, 2012; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005; Washington State, 2015

# Teacher-Student-Family Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of any learning environment, and the quality of relationships between teachers, students, and parents impacts how teachers respond to problem behaviors, how students behave in school. Similarly, the response that teachers have to problem behaviors impacts their relationships with students and parents. Although most teachers endorse the importance of positive educator-student relationships, many are unlikely to espouse an intentional approach to cultivating relationships.

## **Example items:**

- School staff can clearly describe the specific strategies they use to build relationships with students and families.

Citations: Booker, 2006; Cornelius-White, 2006; Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen, & Pianta, 2017; Howard & Terry, 2011; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Hornby & Lafalee, 2011; Kim, 2009; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Murray, Waas, & Murray, 2008; Murray et al., 2014; Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Saft & Pianta, 2001; Warikoo, 2004

# Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally-responsive pedagogy aims to minimize misalignment between students' home and school cultural by incorporating students' identities and backgrounds into the learning experience. Through the use of classroom materials, lesson topics, and instructional practices that reflect students' cultural backgrounds and frames of reference, learning is made more relevant and effective.

## **Example items:**

- New domain – no current items.

Citations: Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2016; Gay, 2010; Grainger, 2016; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014 Larson et al., 2018; Thoms, 2014; Wang & Fredricks

# Identify school strengths and needs for addressing disproportionality

Critical components	Benchmarks of Quality	Check one			
		In place	Needs improvement	Not in place	Don't know
<b>RET team</b>	There is a team focusing on ensuring racial equity in the school				
	The team has support from school administration				
	The team meets regularly (at least monthly)				
	The team has established a clear mission/ purpose and sticks to it.				
	Students from diverse backgrounds are engaged with the RET team in authentic ways				
	Families from diverse backgrounds are engaged in the RET team in authentic ways				
	The team has identified the schools' strengths and needs related to racial equity				
	The team designs and implements clear action steps to promote equity, based on the schools' strengths and needs				
<b>Discipline policy and interpretation</b>	School policies, goals, and mission statements focus explicitly on enhancing equity				
	School policies are reviewed to ensure equity				
	Teachers and staff have clear, consistent understanding of discipline policy and practice				
	Discipline policies reflect and respect the cultural values of the community				
	Discipline policies have a clear purpose linked to educational outcomes				

# Reflection

- In small groups, discuss:
  - How appropriate, feasible, and effective would the program assessment be for your school/district organization to conduct?
  - Which of the 8 domains resonate most with you regarding having an impact on disproportionality within your context

# MENDR Reflection Worksheet

	Greatest Strength	Greatest Need	Most Practical	Most motivating	Most closely tied to goals	Already being addressed
Discipline policy						
Screening & selective supports						
Proactive Behavior Management						
Reactive Behavior Management						
Clean & useful data						
Teacher- student- family relationships						

**Overall Goal: Significantly decrease disproportionality in discipline at the school and foster stronger teacher-student relationship for an equitable, safe and enjoyable learning environment for the entire school community using a race and equity lens through cultural responsiveness and evidence-based practices.**

No.	MENDR Factors	Action steps	Rationale	S.M.A.R.T GOALS	
				Students	Educators
1	Teacher-student-family relationships	Training on the Establish-Maintain-Restore Method to improve relationships. Schools create purposeful, culturally responsive and diverse family engagement and outreach. Teachers intentionally establish relationships through "child time", acknowledgement, validation, and learning about child. Teacher greets children individually every day. After negative interaction, teacher intentionally reconnects with the student. Teacher and school staff intentionally connects to families, provides all families with positive information about each child. Teacher and school staff works to move beyond cultural barriers and reach out to families of different races and ethnicities.	Teachers are less likely to use punitive discipline with youth they understand and have a positive relationship. Teachers who know students well have a better understanding of what types of behavior management works best for the student. Students who have a relationship with teachers feel connected, safe, and respected. This makes students more likely to learn, engage in desired behaviors, and respond to attempts to control behavior. <b>Cross-cultural relationships are more difficult to form due to less shared understanding, implicit bias, and different interpretations of the meaning of behavior, and must therefore receive additional emphasis.</b> Relationships with students and families must intentionally be Established, Maintained (not taken for granted), and Restored (to repair any harm after a negative interaction.) Attempts to engage and build relationships with families should be frequent, positive, employ a wide variety of techniques, and offer opportunities for families with different strengths and needs to participate.	Improve relations with teachers. Improved behavior and time on task. Improved positive attitudes. Strong school climate scores. Students of color report relationships with educators that are as strong as white and Asian students.	Improve relations with students. Increased positive interactions with students and positive attitudes. Teachers report relationships with students of color to be as strong as relationships with white and Asian students.
2	School and district discipline policy, and interpretation of policy by teachers, students, and families	Use of the MENDR Program Review (MPR) to obtain new view of policy and understanding. Conducted review of discipline policy to align with best practices--remove zero tolerance language, provide alternatives to punitive discipline. Review policies through an equity lens and from a "power" versus "purpose" perspective--ensure all policies have clear purpose linked to educational outcomes. Involve students and families in determining school rules. School uses a process for providing students with explicit teaching about expected behavior at school, and discuss differences between home, neighborhood, and school expectations. School rules and expectations are posted throughout the school using positive, engaging language.	When students, families, and teachers agree on the definition and purpose of school rules, miscommunication and feelings of unjust applications of discipline will be minimized. Discipline will be more likely to be administered fairly and with a purpose. School rules and discipline policies that are focused on "purpose" over "power" are less likely to be triggered by implicit bias and desire to enforce power, and more likely to translate to a positive learning environment. Students and teachers need clear definitions of what is considered acceptable behavior, particularly when these expectations differ between school and home. Helping students understand these differences at the beginning of the school year, when disproportionality can be at its greatest, can be most effective.	Increased understanding of purpose of school rules and teacher expectations. Improved behavior. Improved sense of safety. Decrease disproportionality in discipline	Better understanding of discipline policies and procedures. Consistent application of "purpose" rules and discipline.
3	Universal screening and effective supports for students in need	Development of screening and selective interventions in collaboration with MTSS/PBIS. Identification and implementation of evidence-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Ensure that students of color have equal access to and engagement with interventions.	Some students have more intensive behavioral health needs and these may require more intensive supports. Often, youth are selected for behavioral health supports in culturally biased ways and often based on the interpretation of teachers, with African American students more likely to be punitively disciplined for behavior and white students more likely to be referred to Tier 2/3 interventions. Universal, culturally-appropriate, and evidence-based screening efforts can be a fairer way to identify students in need and connect them with appropriate supports. Once referred, schools may need to engage in extra efforts to build trust, reassure students and parents about the purpose of the supports, and provide resources to eliminate barriers to engaging in and continuing with the supports. Supports should be culturally appropriate, warm, and engaging for all youth, and extra efforts should be made to engage students and families of color.	Improve and increase screening and selective to support students' needs. Students of color engage in and are retained in services at rates equal to white and Asian students.	Increased use of screening and selective interventions
4	Effective proactive behavior management and classroom leadership	GREET-STOP-PROMPT and other trainings on Proactive Classroom Management and effective reactive discipline strategies. Teacher maintains relationships and reinforces positive behavior through 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions. Reward and recognition systems incorporate student's culture. Additional positive reinforcement strategies used at the beginning of school year and with students whose behavioral expectations differ between the	Prevention problems from happening in the first place is the most effective way to reduce discipline problems, but one of the most common areas of teacher complaint is that they have not received sufficient training on proactive behavior management. Students are less likely to misbehave if they understand expectations, are rewarded for good behavior, and feel a close bond with the teacher, classroom, and school. Teachers are less likely to use punitive discipline if they feel effective and in control of their classroom, if they understand their own implicit biases and how to mindfully	Improvement of student quality of education	Increased use of proactive disciplinary techniques.

MENDR has a menu!



# MENDR Assessment-to-Action Menu



## Next Steps!

- Measurement grant proposal submitted to the Institute of Education Sciences in August 2019
- Build consensus on measure items, pilot and conduct psychometric testing, build a user interface to improve the utility of measure results
- Should funding occur, we will be seeking research partners:
  - Experts (teachers, practitioners, researchers, administrators, or others) in disproportionality and/or discipline
    - Expert advisory focus groups
  - Schools to help pilot the measure and the beta online feedback system