Statement on Racism in America

Disclaimer

The objective of this response/statement is to provide national best practice guidance but is to be implemented within the confines of each state nurse practice act and other laws affecting the practice of nursing.

Purpose

The National Association of State School Nurse Consultants (NASSNC) recognizes the impact of racism and white supremacy on children, youth, and families. We seek to provide our members with a clear statement of the association’s position and provide anti-racism resources and action steps to support opportunities in each state to improve outcomes for students and people of color. This document also seeks to encourage state and national government leaders to support the reallocation of resources to mitigate years of white privilege and racism’s impact on health and education. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are among our affirmed core values.

Position Statement

It is the position of the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants that racism and white supremacism in any form is a public health crisis perpetuated by the structure of foundational institutions, including healthcare, government, and education. The systemic nature of inequity leads to disparities in health, education, and economic achievement of individuals of color. As professionals that engage in all three of these spheres, the members of the association work to bring about systemic, sustainable change in these systems to celebrate and ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, health equity, and racial and social justice. All students and school personnel have the right to a safe, healthy, inclusive school environment free of discrimination with access to equitable education and curricula that call out and explain the sources of racism and white supremacism as well as celebrate the diversity of humankind.

Context

The current conversation in the United States has predominantly been about racism against Black Americans. The United States of America is a large and diverse country. Because of this diversity, racism extends to most non-white populations across the country, including immigrants. Depending on the community or location in the country, racism may be seen more regarding non-white, non-Black persons.
Use of appropriate language can be difficult in composing a document such as this. Recommendations on appropriate terminology can vary depending on the part of the country in which you live, your age, and your awareness of or sensitivity to meaning. The primary authors of this document engaged in robust discussions about proper terminology and consulted with experts and continue to struggle with appropriate language. NASSNC condemns all racism, whether the subject is BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), immigrant, Latinx, Asian, Native American, or part of any other group hereafter referred to as communities of color who experience racism. Because of this, a variety of terms have been used in this document. They were not intended to be exclusive, divisive, or inappropriate.

Background

The killing of Mr. George Floyd on Memorial Day, 2020, was the most recent in the history of extrajudicial deaths of Black people in the United States of America and was the catalyst for creation of this document. During the time of its writing, additional deaths of Black men at the hands of the police as well as young Black men found hanged in trees in public spaces have occurred.

Racism and white privilege are longstanding realities in this country that are supported by implicit and explicit biases, systemic institutional structures, and interpersonal relationships. White supremacism and racism are ideological tools designed to maintain social and economic stratification. White supremacism and racism are promoted to prevent social unity and, therefore, disrupt the general welfare among all the people of the United States.

It is not race, but racism, that leads to disproportionately high rates of homelessness, incarceration, poor education, and economic hardship for Black Americans, indigenous people, and communities of color. Racial discrimination is visible in housing, education, the criminal justice system, and employment. The persistence of structurally-incentivized residential segregation, unequal access to quality healthcare and affordable housing, achievement gaps in education, and discrimination in hiring practices lead to a significant wealth gap between white families and families of color that costs the United States almost $2 trillion annually in lost purchasing power, reduced job opportunities, and diminished productivity.

Racism is an ongoing public health crisis that attacks people’s physical and mental health. These health inequities are not as a result of individual behavior choices or genetic predisposition but economic, political, and social conditions related to racism. The disparities have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic with unequal access to testing, treatment and care; heightened risks for illness due to economic pressures to continue to work; poorer outcomes and higher rates of morbidity and mortality among communities of color.

Racism is a social determinant of health that impacts the health of children, adolescents, emerging adults, and their families. Its effects shape child and adolescent development and adversely affects individuals who receive, commit, and observe racism. Children experience structural racism through place (where they live), education (where they learn), economic means (what they have, family wealth), and legal means (how their rights are executed, just treatment by the legal system).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events in the life of a child that can have negative effects on a child’s health and wellbeing that extend throughout life. Experiencing three or more traumatic events in childhood increase the likelihood that a person will experience poor
educational outcomes, limited employment opportunities, chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance abuse. While experiencing one ACE is not unusual in the United States, children in communities of color have a greater risk of experiencing four or more ACEs, including 61% of non-Hispanic Black children and 51% of Hispanic children, compared to 40% of non-Hispanic white children. Again, these outcomes are the results of racism, not race.

Definitions

**Structural or Systemic Racism:** A system in which policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity which result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups. Because it is a feature imbedded in social, economic, and political systems, individual intent is not necessary. Structural racism analysis pays more attention to the historical, cultural, and social psychological aspects of society.

**Individual Racism:** Includes an individual’s racist assumptions, beliefs, and face-to-face or covert actions toward a person that intentionally express prejudice, hate, or bias based on race. It is supported and reinforced by systemic or structural racism.

**Everyday Racism:** Racialized microevents connected to macrostructures of racial injustice, particularly because the normalizing everydayness serves as a barrier to dismantling racism.

**Implicit Bias:** Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously. These biases, which are both favorable and unfavorable, are involuntary and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Biases are implicit associations in the subconscious that cause feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, residence, disability, and appearance.

**Racial Equity:** In a racially equitable society, the distribution of society’s benefits and burdens would not be determined by race. A person would be no more or less likely to experience society’s benefits or burdens due to race. Racial equality means all have the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Racial equity means all experience equal access to opportunities and resources without regard to race.

**White Privilege:** Advantages held by whites, related to historical and contemporary access to quality education, decent jobs, livable wages, homeownership, retirement benefits, wealth, etc.

**White Supremacy or White Supremacism:** The racist belief that lighter skinned people are superior to people of color and therefore should be dominant over them. It has roots in the discredited doctrine of scientific racism and relied on pseudoscientific arguments, but in contemporary usage support tenets including 1) whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may co-exist; 2) whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society; 3) white people have their own "culture" that is superior to other cultures; and 4) white people are genetically superior to other people.

**Call to Action:** Everyone must act. The following actions are organized by intended audience.

**For the Association.**

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• *Demonstrate* equity and justice in our organization by identifying and implementing specific activities, policies, and procedures to embrace diversity and to incorporate antiracism. Develop a plan to understand, address, and dismantle racism and white supremacy. 

• *Build* alliances and partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism. Encourage other state, regional, and national entities to acknowledge racism and white supremacy as a public health crisis. Health equity is unachievable unless racism is addressed through interdisciplinary partnerships with other organizations addressing the issue.

• *Advocate* for policies and programs that diversify the pediatric workforce and provide ongoing professional education to reduce implicit biases and improve safety and quality in the educational and healthcare system.

• *Name.* Utilize uppercase B when referencing Black or African American people. Call out racism when it occurs, including structural racism. Recognize that people’s intersectional identities and their perceptions further increase their likelihood of being discriminated against. These include factors such as gender, sexual identity, religion, national origin, disability, age, and other factors that are connected to racism and discrimination.

• *Act.* Address the needs of school nurses around the country so that they can better serve students and staff.

**For States.** School nurse consultants and other advocates for school health must work together to set a culture of health and inclusion within the state.

• Advocate to develop a state level, multi-agency task force that conducts a needs assessment to determine where improvements and changes are needed. The task force should include multiple government agencies as well as other organizations whose mission is to address racism and/or who represent minority groups. The needs assessment should include hearing the voices of students, families, educators, and community leaders to learn of the concerns, challenges, and opportunities.

• Develop a plan to address ways to create a culture of acceptance and stops racial inequities that are seen in the schools and communities serving students. The plan will coordinate efforts with other agencies and organizations for a united effort that reinforces a culture of acceptance and anti-racism. The plan will include:
  
  o Key data points, including data collected from the Office of Civil Rights, that can be reviewed yearly to determine if progress is being made.  
  o Identification of key policies and programs to address racism that need to be developed or withdrawn.  
  o Identification of new ways to blend and braid resources so that there are equitable resources to school districts and communities.

**For Schools.** School nurses should advocate and lead school district/building efforts.

• *Form* a diversity club that actively seeks opportunities to celebrate and educate students and staff about diversity and culture.

• *Include.* Students who are considered at-risk due to racism should be included in the scope of work of at-risk teams.

• *Include* evidence-based curriculum that teaches students and families how to recognize implicit bias and address racism. Include field trips, assemblies, and other learning opportunities to learn

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and celebrate diversity broadly. It should allow diversity within Black culture to be seen and celebrated so that students understand Blackness is not a monolith.

- **Ensure** libraries include books and other media with heroes and heroines of diverse backgrounds, where the villains are not minority races, and that explore the experience of racism. Books and other media must accurately portray the contributions of non-whites to American history, culture, science, etc., and offer critiques of books and other media that demonstrate or promote racism and white supremacy.

- **Ensure** schools policies regarding bullying and violence call out addressing racism. This includes a check and balance system related to school discipline measures and tracking of data on all incidences to ensure no racial profiling or discrimination. This also includes having an advocate and process for students who feel they have been unfair targeted due to race.

- **Ensure** health services policies and practices are equitable. Review all data, including health data, to determine if there are differences in academic and health outcomes. Include number of care plans, health office visits, transportation, or referrals on students by race.

- **Assess** the involvement of students of color and indigenous students in academics (regular and special education), school services, and school activities. Determine corrective action. For example, in a school with 2/5 students of color, the Student Council, which met after school, was predominantly white. Participants in after-school activities had proportionally fewer students of color. Bussing was provided after school, but not for after-school activities. Remedy: Change Student Council meetings to the lunch period and/or provide bussing for after-school activities so all students may participate.

- **Advocate** for equitable resources to districts and schools in low income areas.

- **Recruit** actively school staff with diverse backgrounds. Hire, support, and advance the careers of more employees from communities of color, and provide multidimensional, professional development for personnel and administrators across all racial and ethnic groups.\(^{21}\)

- **Provide** training at least yearly to all school staff regarding cultural diversity, discrimination, and racism.

- **Advocate** for school policies that reinforce a culture of diversity. Conduct exercises that memorialize the impact of racism (such as holding 8 minutes and 46 seconds of silence). Reflect on insidious and pervasive racism in individual practice, schools, and communities. Has there been micro or macro change? Discuss next steps and take action.

- **Sustain momentum.** Work with a student group to develop a calendar of weekly strategies to recognize racism and support equity. Include actionable items for students of every age, school faculty and staff, families, and community members. Encourage students to alternate leader, follower, and sustainer roles.

**For School Nurses.** Each school nurse should encourage themselves, colleagues, and neighbors to act.

- **See, Listen, Believe, Honor, and Respond.** Amplify Black voices. Be present and listen to the lived experience of racism as told by students, families, colleagues, and community members to understand and respond. Only when white people can do this and honor people of color as experts in their own lives can they become more effective allies.\(^{21}\) Recognize this might be uncomfortable as people begin to feel others’ pain. Demonstrate vulnerability and willingness to change by sharing with colleagues the errors in your own thinking, perceptions, judgments, speaking, and decisions and corrections made. State what has been instructive in being informed by others or becoming aware of personal bias. Be bold. Act when you witness racism. State, “I am concerned. I need to start an uncomfortable conversation about a situation where I...”
believe a student/parent/colleague has been viewed/treated, intentionally or unintentionally, with bias. I saw... and I saw the person react...... I have become aware of how often my own action and inaction undermine the humanity of others. I am saying something now because I am trying to do better.”

- **Be an Ally.** Take the risk to be an ally, despite fear of making a mistake.\(^2\) See and celebrate diversity. Articulate actions you plan to take to confirm that Black lives do indeed matter.\(^3\) Form interracial coalitions that peacefully oppose anti-Blackness, anti-persons of color, and pursue racial equity for Black Americans and other persons of color. Ensure these coalitions have Black representatives, as well as from other communities of color such as indigenous people, Hispanic, Asian, immigrant, and other groups in the local community. Find an organization working for racial justice, follow them, and respond to their calls for action.\(^2\)

- **Be a thoughtful healthcare professional.** Be prepared to discuss and counsel families of all races on the effects of exposure to racism as victims, bystanders, and perpetrators.\(^5\) Seek to effect change for anyone who is marginalized, because your influence matters. Consider carefully why a communication, recommendation or action plan is not followed by a student or parent. ‘Noncompliance’ is a problem, not of the client, but of the healthcare professional. Is the idea you presented is not heard or received, not realistic or does not provide a reasonable solution? Are resources accessible and acceptable? Is an underlying reason intended bias or unintended due to institutional racism? Create an inclusive health services office environment by displaying images of all races in health promotion messages (example: CDC’s influenza posters in 16 languages), providing books in the health office on racism and multiculturalism, and being sensitive to school supplies that match the students in your schools (i.e., color of adhesive bandages). Ask students to develop bulletin boards, materials, and social media of inclusive health promotion messages.

- **Check in.** Ask students, families, and school personnel who may be affected by racism, "What can I do to help you feel safe and valued? What can we do at our school?" Listen and act on what has been shared.\(^2\) Ask adults – colleagues, families, and community members – and students to identify when your words or actions have made them feel uncomfortable, disregarded, or denigrated. Ask them to teach you to do better, to be a nurse who consistently and unconditionally affirms others, especially those s/he serves. Specify a signal that can be easily and immediately given such as raised eyebrows, finger tapping on table, or hand over heart.

- **Mental Health.** Recognize the need for student access/referrals to mental health services for coping with the trauma of racism, both in general and at this particular moment in time.\(^5\) Advocate for increased access to support for mental health services in schools to help teachers appropriately manage students with disruptive classroom behaviors and to address school expulsion racial disparities.\(^5\)

- **Study and Educate Yourself.** It is each person’s responsibility to learn for themselves about race. It is not the job of people of color to educate white people. Engage in ongoing study to unlearn the racism that is constantly reinforced in society.\(^2\) Identify your own conditioning and decision-making processes, especially in relation to stereotypes.\(^1\) Understanding this may mean admitting you are unable to understand (if you are not of the same race/ethnicity as others). Accept that implicit bias happens and understand why and how.\(^2\) Advocate for federal, state, and local policies that support implicit-bias training in schools.\(^14\)

- **Understand the connections between words and actions.** Interrupt all forms of racism that make racist violence possible. Jokes, stereotypes, and invisibility are just a few of the microaggressions and daily insults to people of color that white people must interrupt.\(^2\) Hire, support, and
advance the careers of people from communities of color, and provide multidimensional professional development for personnel and administrators across all racial and ethnic groups.23

- **Advocate** for local, state, regional, and federal initiatives and relevant policies that improve health in communities of color and supports that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism. Engage community leaders to improve environments such as by creating safe playgrounds and healthy food markets to reduce disparities in obesity and undernutrition in neighborhoods affected by poverty.5 Invite students of color to become health professionals, especially school nurses. Recognize curiosity and compassion in students so that the health professionals in the future reflect the diversity in the population.

- **Make donations** to every school library to purchase books for children and families. Infuse cultural diversity into early literacy-promotion programs to ensure that there is a representation of authors, images, and stories that reflect the cultural diversity of children.

- **Support schools.** Take action related to health services programming. Take your turn in leading a school-wide initiative. Advocate for change, such as improvements in the quality of education designed to better optimize vocational attainment and educational milestones for all students.23 Review school policies and practices to uncover and eliminate racism, including the disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion among students of color, and inequities in access to Gifted programs that reflect a systemic bias in the educational system.10,11,23 Advocate for policies and programs that diversify the teacher workforce;5 engage school staff on education on cultural diversity, discrimination, and racism.23 Provide evidence-based curriculum that teaches students and families how to recognize implicit bias and address racism, as well as curricula that are multicultural, multilingual, and reflective of the communities in which children in their practices attend school.5,11,13

**Conclusion**

The National Association of State School Nurse Consultants (NASSNC) calls on its members, legislators, governments, school nurses, school systems, partners, and other child advocates to recognize and eliminate policies, practices, and structures that facilitate ongoing racism and white supremacy and build a culture that celebrates diversity and inclusion.

**Resources**

**For Students**

- Glazer Children’s Museum. [https://glazermuseum.org/socialjustice?fbclid=IwAR3mJPyT_4Tkdjz8K-annxEBkM2t1UyGf2SCu65BdulkOe0L_rbJdo4IoI-A](https://glazermuseum.org/socialjustice?fbclid=IwAR3mJPyT_4Tkdjz8K-annxEBkM2t1UyGf2SCu65BdulkOe0L_rbJdo4IoI-A)
- *Something Happened in Our Town* - Children’s book about racial injustice. Here is a link to an animated reading of the book. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcOhQFGcWm8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcOhQFGcWm8)

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