













- **Culturally Relevant and Responsive Instruction**

Teachers can create safe and respectful classroom environments through materials, events, and teaching that reflect the diversity of their classrooms and community.<sup>98</sup>

- **Bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments**

Analyzing disaggregated data can allow school teams to determine if different groups of students receive different penalties for the same infraction.

Teachers can avoid the trap of differential treatments by replacing snap judgments about discipline with time to reflect on the nature of the interaction.

- **Use Problem-Solving Approaches to Discipline**

Restorative practices train staff in structured problem solving to identify contributors to conflict, offering a promising approach for reducing the discipline gap.<sup>99</sup>

- **Recognizing Student and Family Voice**

The experience of community organizations such as Denver’s *Padres y Jovenes Unidos*<sup>100</sup> have shown that schools with issues of disproportionate discipline benefit greatly from reaching out to parents and students to understand their concerns.

- **Reintegrating students after conflict**

After long-term absences due to suspension, expulsion, or detention, “transition centers,” involving collaboration between probation, mental health, child welfare, and school districts, can assist in the successful transition of excluded youth back into school.

It is unclear whether interventions must be tailored to specific racial/ethnic or cultural populations in order to have an impact on student outcomes.<sup>101</sup> However, closing racial discipline gaps will almost certainly require interventions and programs that are in some way *race-conscious*—that is, conscious of overall race dynamics in student-educator relationship and interaction.

At the same time, we cannot assume that any specific intervention or program, however effective it may appear to be in general, will reduce racial and ethnic disparities until we specifically test and measure the effect of that program on such disparities. In order to know whether any intervention or strategy is effective in closing racial gaps, then, evaluating its

effects specifically on *racial/ethnic disparities* is key. As part of any new program, educators, policymakers and researchers seeking to reduce racial inequity will need to answer the question: *What is the evidence that our efforts have specifically reduced race and ethnic disparities in discipline?*

## Does a Race-Conscious Approach Make A Difference?

Talking about race is linked to improved outcomes when it is tied to actual school reforms and practices focused on achieving equity in schools. In Tyrone Howard’s<sup>101</sup> study of four schools successful in closing racial achievement gaps, he identifies five attributes commonly found across the schools that were fundamental in each of the school’s ability to produce high achievers in challenging circumstances. One of these attributes was explicitly acknowledging race, racism, and its perceived influence on learning. The other attributes included visionary leadership, effective instructional practice, intensive academic intervention, and parental and community engagement. More research and interventions utilizing race- and culture-conscious approaches are needed to fully explore the potential of such interventions.

## CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of our attempts to avoid the topic, the issue of race emerges over and over again, permeating our society and conditioning our lives. For Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and many other African American males, the translation of racialized thinking into action yielded deadly consequences. For many other youth in our nation, the consequences of our heritage of presumed racial difference and longstanding segregation play themselves out on a daily basis, through lowered expectations, decreased educational opportunity, and disciplinary overreaction. This is an old problem. Corrosive stereotypes—like the dangerous Black male—rooted themselves deep in our nation’s psyche and, whether or not they reach our consciousness, remain entwined in our thinking and our practices today. Throughout much of our history, the structures of slavery, Jim Crow, and other forms of racial exclusion were purposely intended to maintain deep divisions between us, to the advantage of some groups and the detriment of others.

Even as we celebrate anniversaries of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the civil rights movement challenging the legal framework of segregation and division, judicial rulings and federal policy have reversed that early momentum, maintaining and reinforcing

structural inequality and boundaries of race and class. Although based on social understandings rather than biological realities, perceptions of racial difference continue to determine who has opportunity and privilege, and who does not. At the same time, the benefits of integration foreseen by its advocates—that increased contact would lead to increased understanding, empathy, and ultimately equality—have not occurred, simply because there has not yet been real integration in American society. Today in schools, our interactions across racial lines yield differential outcomes in school discipline, with devastating consequences for the young people served.

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*ultimately eradicate them.*

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The topic of racial disparities understandably remains emotionally charged. As in a family that can never discuss its fundamental secrets, our deeply held and often unconscious beliefs, stereotypes, and biases are too rarely brought to the surface, examined, and finally expunged. Yet as much as we seek to lock them from view, race and racism continue to color our interactions, including our disciplinary actions, on a daily, even moment-by-moment basis.

The goal, however, is not simply to talk more about race, or racial disparities in school discipline. We acknowledge that the problems of race and racism require not only school-level changes in conversations and practices but also systemic changes throughout many social institutions in our society, from the economy to the political, judicial and justice systems. Conducted clumsily, conversations about race can increase resistance to facing and addressing the problems that plague us. Even when critical and meaningful dialogues create insights, there is no guarantee that those insights will be brought back into schools and classrooms to create practical differences in treatment. To be effective in truly addressing racial disparities, our conversations about race must be a part of a process in which we a) examine disaggregated data to determine where racial/ethnic

differences occur, b) thoroughly discuss the contexts and interactions creating those data, c) craft interventions to erase those disparities, and d) follow through to ensure that we have truly made a difference, by monitoring the disaggregated data to evaluate the impact of our actions. Ultimately, as has been noted in other papers in this series, achieving racial equity in school discipline requires action, leadership and a commitment to counteract old habits and stereotypes. The roots of racial inequality in our schools and our society are many centuries deep. Eliminating disciplinary disparities, or for that matter any inequity in our educational system, will require an ongoing awareness of how those disparities are produced, and a steadfast commitment to finally bringing them to an end.

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## About the Authors

### Prudence L. Carter, Ph.D.

is a Professor of Education and (by courtesy) of Sociology at Stanford, and Faculty Director of the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. Her expertise ranges from issues of youth identity and race, class, and gender, urban poverty, social and cultural inequality, the sociology of education and mixed research methods. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Keepin' It Real: School Success beyond Black and White* (2005); *Stubborn Roots: Race, Culture, and Inequality in U.S. & South African Schools* (2012); and more recently co-editor of *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance* (all published by Oxford University Press), along with numerous other journal articles, book chapters, and essays.

### Russell J. Skiba, Ph.D.

is a Professor in the School Psychology program at Indiana University and Director of the Equity Project, a consortium of research projects offering evidence-based information to educators and policymakers on equity in special education and school discipline. He has worked with schools across the country in the areas of disproportionality, school discipline, and school violence; has been project director or principal coordinator on numerous federal and state grants; and has published extensively in the areas of school violence, zero tolerance, and equity in education. He was a member of the writing team that produced the U.S. Department of Education's document on school safety, *Early Warning, Timely Response*, and a member

and lead author of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Zero Tolerance. He was awarded the Push for Excellence Award by the Rainbow Coalition/Operation PUSH for his work on African American disproportionality in school suspension. Skiba has testified before the United States Civil Rights Commission, spoken before both Houses of Congress on issues of school discipline and school violence, and has acted as a special consultant to OSEP on issues of disproportionality and equity in special education.

### Mariella I. Arredondo, Ph.D.

is Associate Director of the Equity Project. Dr. Arredondo's leadership role on the Project focuses on making sure that the goals of each project's research, practice, service, and dissemination goals and agendas are achieved and that outcomes and deliverables are ensured. Previously, Dr. Arredondo served as Research Associate in the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative project funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and Open Society Foundations at The Equity Project. Mariella earned her Ph.D. degree in Educational Leadership Policy Studies with a concentration in International Comparative Education from Indiana University-Bloomington. Before joining The Equity Project Mariella focused her research on educational policies targeted at reducing stratification and inequality and working towards the attainment of a more egalitarian and socially just education, both in the United States and globally. She is currently pursuing a research agenda concentrating on the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in disparities in school discipline.

### Mica Pollock, Ph.D.

is an anthropologist of education and Professor of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. She currently leads UC San Diego's Center for Research on Equity, Assessment, and Teaching Excellence (CREATE) as Director. Pollock's own work explores how diverse communities can come together in student support efforts. To date, Pollock has studied communications that support student success in diverse schools and education communities. In multiple projects based in schools, districts, cities, community organizations, and the government, Pollock has asked how people might communicate so they can work together to support every young person's talent development. Pollock's first book, *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School* (winner of the 2005 AERA Outstanding Book Award), helped readers navigate six core U.S. struggles over talking (and not talking) in racial terms in schools. *Because of Race: How Americans Debate Harm and Opportunity in Our Schools* (2008) examined the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights as the background for common debates over improving the everyday school experiences of students and families of color. In *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School* (2008), Pollock organized 70 scholars to write short essays supporting teachers to consider everyday issues of race, opportunity and diversity in their work. Winner of a 2008 Outstanding Book Award from the Gustavus Myers Center, "EAR" is being used to spark educator inquiry in schools and districts across the country.

## Members of the Discipline Disparities Collaborative

**James Bell, J.D.**

Founder and Executive Director  
W. Hayward Burns Institute

**Judith Browne-Dianis, J.D.**

Co-Director  
Advancement Project

**Prudence L. Carter, Ph.D.**

Professor  
Stanford University, School of Education  
and (by courtesy) Sociology

**Christopher Chatmon**

Executive Director of African American  
Male Achievement  
Oakland Unified School District

**Tanya Coke, J.D.**

Distinguished Lecturer  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

**Matt Cregor, J.D.**

Staff Attorney  
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights  
and Economic Justice

**Manuel Criollo**

Director of Organizing  
The Labor/Community Strategy Center

**Edward Fergus, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor  
New York University  
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education,  
and Human Development

**Michelle Fine, Ph.D.**

Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
City University of New York (CUNY)  
The Graduate Center

**Phillip Atiba Goff, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor  
University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)  
Department of Psychology

**Paul Goren, Ph.D.**

Senior Vice President  
Collaborative for Academic, Social,  
and Emotional Learning

**Anne Gregory, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
Rutgers University, Graduate School of  
Applied and Professional Psychology

**Damon T. Hewitt, J.D.**

Senior Advisor, U.S. Programs  
Open Society Foundations

**Daniel J. Losen, J.D.**

Director, Center for Civil Rights Remedies  
The Civil Rights Project at UCLA

**Tammy B. Luu**

Associate Director  
The Labor/Community Strategy Center

**Kavitha Mediratta, Ph.D.**

Head, Racial Equity Programmes  
Atlantic Philanthropies

**Pedro Noguera, Ph.D.**

Executive Director  
The Metropolitan Center for  
Urban Education

**Mica Pollock, Ph.D.**

Director  
University of California San Diego (UCSD)  
Center for Research on Equity,  
Assessment, and Teaching Excellence

**Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D.**

Distinguished Professor  
University of Arizona  
Norton School of Family and  
Consumer Services

**Russell Skiba, Ph.D.**

Director  
The Equity Project at Indiana University

**Leticia Smith-Evans, J.D., Ph.D.**

Interim Director, Education Practice  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

**Lisa Thomas, Ed.D.**

Associate Director  
American Federation of Teachers

**Michael Thompson**

Director  
The Justice Center

**Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D.**

Deputy Director  
The White House Initiative on Historically  
Black Colleges and Universities

**The Equity Project at Indiana University  
Center for Evaluation and Education Policy**

**1900 East Tenth Street**

**Bloomington, Indiana 47406**

**812-855-4438**

**equity@indiana.edu**

**rtpcollaborative.indiana.edu**