

Position Statement Supporting Black Lives Matter in Education
LeBron James Family Foundation School of Education

The LeBron James Family Foundation School of Education stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC) have experienced racial injustice in classrooms and communities. We are committing to anti-racism work as a School and we also commit to supporting others doing anti-racism work.

The systemic and continuing instances of brutality toward Black people and the refusal of the court system to punish police who have committed these crimes has fueled an explosion of protests – from the streets to the schools. Most recently, after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020, 40 U.S. cities imposed curfews and National Guard members were activated in at least 23 states and Washington, DC.

We believe and champion Abolitionist teaching practices (Love, 2019) to eradicate white supremacy and build capacity to challenge violence systematically inflicted on BIPOC communities. We are dedicated to bringing awareness to all current and future educators preparing them to actively combat and counter acts of racial violence and injustice. In our School of Education, this also includes preparing professionals to work with BIPOC K-12 students and educators who are bringing the trauma associated with racism into the classroom. #BlackLivesMatter must matter in pedagogy, course offerings, policy and practices in classrooms, schools, and communities.

Racial injustice is real. Per the Sentencing Project Report to the United Nations (2018), systemic racism thrives in U.S. criminal justice, housing, schools, and healthcare. In the U.S., Black Americans are 5.9 times as likely to be incarcerated than whites and Hispanics are 3.1 times as likely. One in every three black males born today can expect to go to prison at some point in their life, compared with one in every six Latino males, and one in every 17 white males, if current incarceration trends continue. (Sentencing Project, 2018). Indigenous families, as a result of historic and systematic racism, also face disproportionate lack of access to health care, employment, and education outcomes (Boone, 2018).

Specifically, in K-12 schools and education:

- Policies and pathologizing mindsets are rooted in labeling, surveillance, and punishment that criminalize BIPOC youth. Ruth Wilson Gilmore notes: “Schools work within a web of institutions, policies, and practices that funnel Black youth into prisons. What’s more, depending on where you attend school, it no longer operates as a ‘pathway’ to prison but instead as a de facto prison”. (Meiners, 2007)
- Black disabled youth are more likely to be educated in segregated classrooms (De Vanelzuela, Copeland, & Park, 2006) and less likely to graduate than disabled white students (NCES, 2019).
- Queer and gender nonconforming Black youth are also disciplined at high rates and often not protected by the safe spaces created for white LGBTQ youth (Truong, Zongrone, & Kosciw, 2020).
- Advanced Placement and gifted classes largely exclude BIPOC youth (Annamma & Morriso, 2018).

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- The Bureau of Indian Affairs finds that between 29 percent and 36 percent of all Native American students drop out of high school, and numbers are even higher in areas where parents of Native American children complain of a major lack in understanding by educators of native culture (Native Youth Magazine, 2020).
- Native American students are disproportionately disciplined more than most other racial groups. They represent less than 1 percent of the student population, but 2 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 3 percent of expulsions (Boone, 2018).
- On the 2017 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP, 2019), fourth grade Black students scored 25 points lower on the math assessment than white students. In eighth grade of that same year, Black students scored 32 points lower than their white counterparts. This mathematics achievement gap hinders Black students' development of mathematical identity and future opportunities for careers in STEM fields.
- National reading scores also show gaps based on racial groups. According to the NAEP 2019 report, the average national score on the fourth grade reading for White children was 229, Black children was 203, Hispanic children was 208, and, for American Indian/Alaskan native children, it was 204.
(<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/reading/2019/>) Falling behind on grade level norms in reading can impact a child's achievement in all other content areas for the rest of their schooling.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963, April 16), in his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, cautioned against preferring “a negative peace (the absence of tension) to a positive peace (the presence of justice)” and went on to say “Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will (para. 19).” Faculty in the LeBron James Family Foundation School of Education stand ready, willing, and committed to broker a positive peace through our teaching, research, and service that prepares Anti-racist educators to instate “good trouble” and *actively* combat and counter acts of racism and injustice against BIPOC.

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