



Michigan Association of School Social Workers Position Statement- Condemning Systemic Racism and What We Can Do

Last month, yet another racially unjust incident, the murder of an African-American man, George Floyd, occurred at the hands of white police officers, setting off a resurgence, this time worldwide, of the Black Lives Matters movement. The Michigan Association of School Social Workers (MASSW) stands with the Black Lives Matter movement and takes a firm stand against police brutality, the use of lethal force, and systemic racism. We recognize that for over 400 years, racial inequalities have permeated every corner of our society and despite marginal gains continue to oppress black people and people of color in this country. Through social media, on May 25, 2020, the whole world was able to bear witness to how little black lives did, in fact, seem to matter; and on the heels of that tragic day, the world bore witness to Amy Cooper wielding her whiteness like a sword as she threatened to call the police and tell them an African-American man was threatening her when no such thing was happening. She undoubtedly understood the power of her skin color in America.

These instances were just two more in a series of recent painful reminders of the racial injustices in America set against the backdrop of a global pandemic; after Breonna Taylor, Dominique Clayton, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others, whose crime, punishable by death, was being black in America.

As School Social Workers, we acknowledge and condemn the racial and social inequities across the nation. We acknowledge that these racial inequities exist in education as well and we advocate for change. Two such examples are the lack of equitable resources and disparities in discipline. Most recently the resource disparity was heightened during the pandemic when inner-city students, which includes many black children, did not have access to the necessary technology in order to participate in virtual learning. Racial disparities in the way discipline is carried out in schools have also created what is commonly referred to as the school to prison pipeline. There are many instances where black students, attending schools in suburban districts, are disciplined more harshly than their white peers for the same offenses. We know that these injustices have the potential to have serious and long-term effects on black children; and that what happens in schools is a mere reflection of the systemic racism of our society. Little has been done to rectify these inequities in education and studies would suggest that segregation of schools is increasing and so is the “opportunity gap.”

So what can School Social Workers do? Support the Black Lives Matter movement. As agents of social change MASSW asks that you join us in making the following pledge to end racism, injustice, and discrimination:

- ★ We pledge to proactively teach students what racial prejudice, bias, and bigotry is and that there is no place for it in our schools.
- ★ We pledge to question administrative decisions/practices that appear to disproportionately discipline and suspend black children.
- ★ We pledge to have hard conversations with teachers and staff who have intentional or unintentional racially biased behavior.
- ★ We pledge to speak up about the need to train and hire more diverse teachers.



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Can Do

- ★ We pledge to prompt our school leaders to develop an intentional identity as an anti-racist institution and training programs to support this effort for teachers, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and paraprofessionals.

This country, which claims to represent liberty and justice for ALL, has a long way to go in demonstrating consistency with practicing this claim. As School Social Workers whose ethical principles are steeped in social justice and uplifting one's individual dignity and worth we must lead the way both in our personal and professional lives, in voice and action. MASSW is proud to stand strong to help end systematic racism and bring racial equality to all the students we serve.

Amy Chapman

Amy Chapman, MASSW President

Approved by the Board of Directors, June 8, 2020

The following selections, while not exhaustive, may help guide you in your work:

Books

[Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria.](#) Beverly Daniel Tatum

[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.](#) Peggy McIntosh

[I'm Still Here.](#) Austin Channing

<https://www.teachingforblacklives.org/> A Rethinking Schools Publication (and supporting materials)

Videos

<https://www.facebook.com/NowThisPolitics/videos/2745589452330472/> Systemic Racism Explained

<https://youtu.be/lkCE-ejP5fY> Implicit Racial Bias in School Discipline

Websites

<https://www.tolerance.org/>

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources>

https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-74638_72831---,00.html MDE Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion Toolkit