

Volume 3, Issue 1

# Edge

CAROLINA EDUCATION REVIEW

HIGHLIGHTING EQUITY WORK



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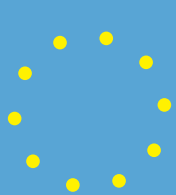
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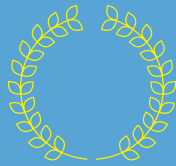
## School of Education

The School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is a community of collaborative researchers, practitioners, students, staff, and engaged alumni. We are dedicated to realizing the transformative power of education: To achieve equity in educational access and outcomes for all learners in a diverse and just society. Our work is guided by four pillars:



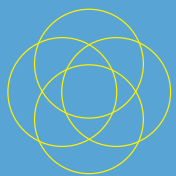
### **Educating the Whole**

We recognize that learning is dependent on the well-being of children, their families, and their communities. With a focus on underprivileged and underserved communities, we seek work with educators, parents, schools, communities, and beyond, in partnership with other UNC-Chapel Hill units, to empower learners and communities to thrive.



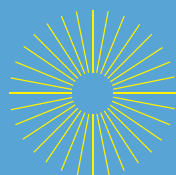
### **Empowering the Leaders of Tomorrow**

We empower educators and scholars to lead; to think creatively, act with passion, and strive for excellence and equity for all. Equipped to succeed in their professions, our graduates also emerge as leaders in their institutions and communities, and mindfully contribute toward continually improving and transforming them.



### **Collaborating for the Greater Good**

We seek productive and meaningful partnerships across disciplinary and institutional boundaries, working with all stakeholders within and beyond formal institutions of education. A well-educated, diverse, and empowered public is key to addressing social inequities and injustices; promoting and supporting the health and well-being of all; and ensuring the competitiveness and prosperity of our state and nation.



### **Advancing Knowledge, Driving Innovation**

We produce cutting-edge knowledge, and pursue innovative, research-based solutions to the most pressing problems of educational theory, practice, programs, and policy in North Carolina, the nation, and beyond.

# From the Dean



## Greetings:

The recent violent and unjust deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery are but the latest in a long history of racism, injustice, atrocities, discrimination, and disparities suffered by Black people and people of color in our country. There hardly is a facet of life where these systemic inequities and disparities are not manifested in the daily struggles of people of color.

At Carolina's School of Education, we stand with communities of color across our nation. We hear them as they articulate profound pain, anger, frustration, sadness, and exhaustion.

We stand in solidarity with people of color, especially Black people, and know that racism is real and ingrained

in our society and, above all, should be eliminated.

We have no doubt that this nation will, in relatively short order, beat the SARS-Cov-2 virus and mitigate the grave health and economic impacts, fears about safety and well-being, and anxieties related to going about daily living brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which are experienced by all people across the nation.

However, Black people will continue their daily struggles with systemic racism, police brutality and associated educational, health, economic and safety disparities well beyond that point. To us, this thought is deeply saddening and frustrating, and demands action.

Education can and should be the cornerstone to that action and the hope to realize change; to dismantle systemic racism.

As a School, we are committed to bringing our collective expertise in research and teaching, as well as our programming, to prepare educators and researchers who work proactively to address systemic inequities and white supremacy in education and in our society.

Together, we advance and celebrate diversity, fight discrimination, foster inclusion, and advocate for equity in every aspect of the lives of all members of our communities, especially those directly and indirectly affected by violence and racially motivated acts.

This special issue of *Edge* showcases some of the work that faculty, staff and students across our School undertake

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**As a School, we are committed to bringing our collective expertise in research and teaching, as well as our programming, to prepare educators and researchers who work proactively to address systemic inequities and white supremacy in education and in our society.**

as part of their deep commitment and permanent engagement with research, teaching, and public service that centers on advancing the causes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice in our schools, communities, and nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fouad', enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval.

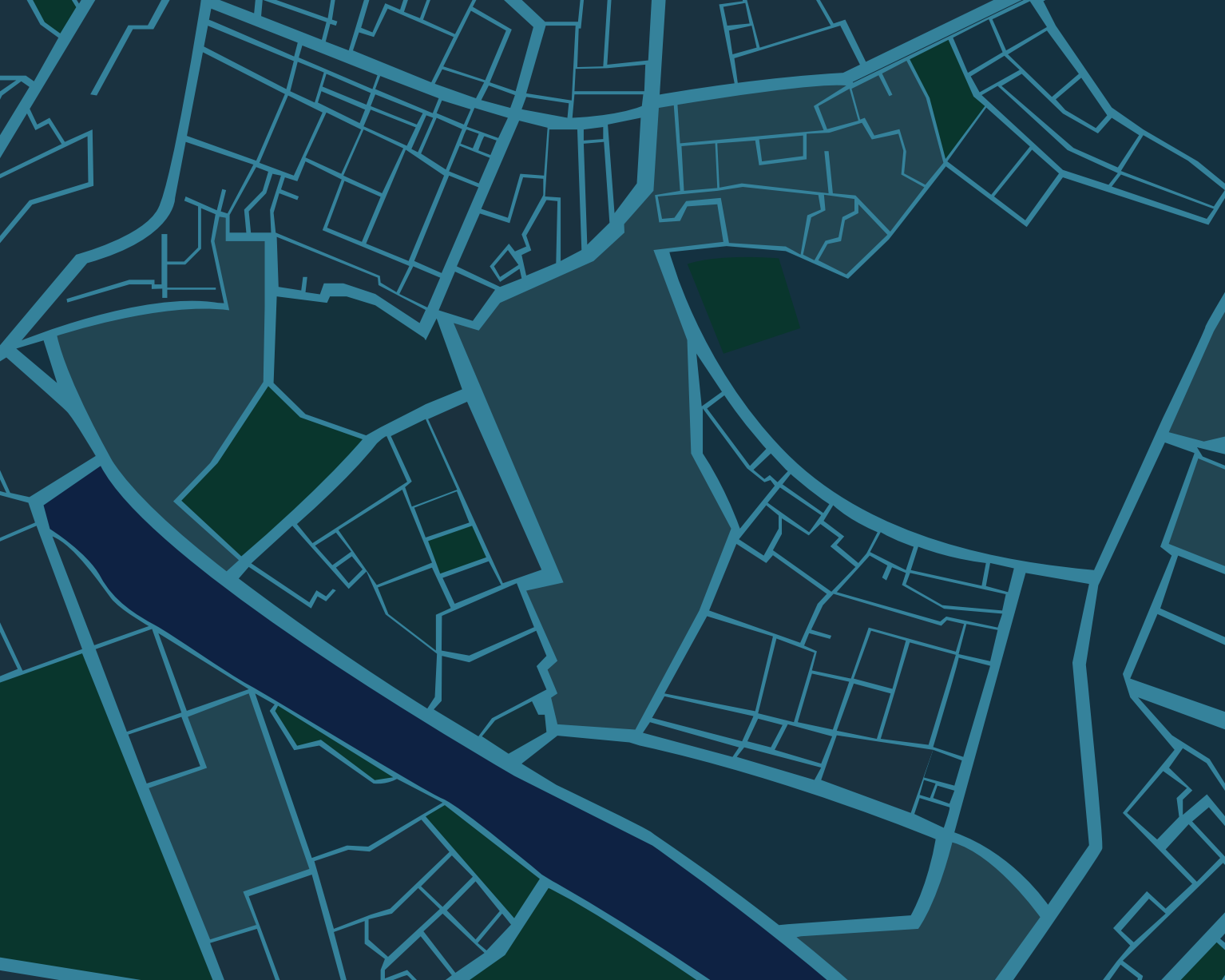
**Fouad Abd-El-Khalick**  
Dean, School of Education  
University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

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# Mapping inequity

School district secessions  
contributing to re-segregation,  
rising disparities for students

Researchers: **Eric Houck & Brittany Murray**

Article by **Michael Hobbs**

**S**chools in America have re-segregated, with students attending public schools that are more racially divided today than they were in the 1960s.

School district secessions, in which new school districts are split from pre-existing districts, make up just one of the mechanisms that have contributed to the racial re-segregation of schools. The re-segregation of schools is having financial impact, leading to a growing wealth disparity among schools, according to a study by Eric Houck, associate professor in educational leadership at the UNC-Chapel Hill



**The Edge:** School district secessions, in which portions of school districts split from pre-existing districts, are contributing to increasing racial segregation of American public schools. Secessions are also serving to exacerbate wealth disparities among school systems. Eric Houck, associate professor in educational leadership and policy at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education, worked with doctoral student Brittany Murray to conduct a study that quantified the financial and demographic changes brought about by school district secessions.

School of Education, and doctoral student Brittany Murray.

Houck is an authority on education finance issues. He is a co-author of one of the leading school finance textbooks — “Modern Education Finance & Policy” — and his research has appeared in publications such as the *Journal of Education Finance*, the *Peabody Journal of Education*, *Education and Urban Society*, and *Leadership and Policy in Schools*.

His recent research focuses on how state-level school funding policies interact with school and school system demographics, particularly via teacher salary structures and student assignment policies.

One aspect of Houck’s research examines the link between school resource allocation and school re-segregation. In this recent study, Houck and then-graduate assistant Murray — now an assistant professor at Davidson College — analyzed the fiscal impacts of school district secessions, finding that they both concentrate the racial makeup of seceding and left-behind districts, and leave fewer resources for the left-behind districts, which often have higher proportions of minority students (Houck & Murray, 2019).

## COURTS OPEN DOORS TO RE-SEGREGATION

Racial segregation in schools was declared unconstitutional in 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that it was unconstitutional to divide schools based on race. In many communities, Whites sought ways to avoid implementing the requirements of *Brown*, spurred by the Court’s additional ruling in 1955 known as *Brown v. Board of Education II* in which justices outlined the steps to be taken to desegregate schools and called for the work to be done “with all deliberate speed.”

Building upon the “go slow” approach of *Brown II*, in the decades since *Brown*, courts have issued a series of rulings that have made it easier for communities to re-segregate their schools. Among the cases: *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* in 1972 and *Milliken v. Bradley* in 1974.

In *Rodriguez*, the Court ruled that education was not a fundamental right and that school funding mechanisms based on local property taxes did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. The ruling allowed inter-district variation in community financial support for schools to remain in place, allowing wealthier school districts



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Associate Professor of  
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**Brittany Murray**  
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College

to use their wealth to fund higher teacher salary supplements, better instructional materials, and other resources.

In *Milliken*, the Court disallowed efforts to balance racial makeup of schools across school district boundaries, allowing districts to maintain racial segregation if they could demonstrate that the segregation was not the result of specific laws.

The effect of the two rulings was to lock into place districts with student populations made up primarily of racial minorities. The decisions also locked into place an unequal balance of wealth.

### INCENTIVES TO SEPARATE

School funding systems are complex, with a combination of federal, state, and local funding structures, each with its own funding sources and purposes.

State funds are the largest source of revenue for most school districts, with a wide variety of allocation mechanisms. Federal funds are most often allocated to lower-wealth districts, seeking to support schools with fewer resources and greater educational challenges among their students. Local funds often serve as supplements, using local property tax wealth to support higher teacher salaries and other instructional support.

The ability of wealthier localities to generate greater amounts of local school funding support creates incentives for them to separate from larger school districts, allowing the wealthier communities to concentrate their greater school funds to a targeted group of students.

Houck and Murray sought to determine what advantages school districts obtain by seceding into new districts.

### WHAT THE DATA SAY

Houck and Murray sought evidence of the effects of school district secessions by analyzing data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, the Stanford Education Data Archive, and the U.S. Census' American Communities Survey. Examining data from 36 seceded districts and 26 original districts, they created analytical models that demonstrated changes in revenue and changes in racial segregation a year after a district seceded from another — measuring changes in both the seceding districts and the original, or “left-behind,” districts.

**Funding.** Seceded districts received \$1,837 more overall funding per pupil. The seceded districts received \$395 more state funding and \$1,655 more local funding, while getting \$169 less federal funding per pupil.

This overall result is that secession was beneficial for seceding districts, and detrimental for the remaining districts.

**Demographics.** Seceded districts were comprised of 3% more white students, had 6% fewer Black students, and 1% fewer economically disadvantaged students than their left-behind districts.

“Descriptively, these findings demonstrate that new seceded districts are advantaging themselves relative to the districts that remain,” Houck and Murray write. “Racial differences between seceded and remaining districts are almost entirely driven by Black student population, a piece of evidence that may indicate a connection between seceding districts and White flight community impulses.


“Fiscally, seceding districts realize higher levels of funding per pupil, driven

almost entirely by increases in local revenues that offset marginal changes in state revenues and decreases in more targeted federal revenues per pupil,” they write.

### PERPETUATING WIDENING SEGREGATION

Across the country, more school districts are being formed from secessions. The newly formed districts are contributing to increasing racial segregation of American schools.

The left-behind districts are also poorer. A district facing the secession of another district faces a loss of almost \$400 in per-pupil funding, perpetuating a failing schools narrative and thwarting efforts to establish greater equity among schools.

Houck and Murray conclude: “This ability to literally game the system for fiscal and demographic advantage shows that the court in *Brown* was able to articulate a vision, but unable to define the mechanisms by which that vision would be realized, nor able to anticipate the myriad pathways school leaders would take to resist or defy accepting the burden of that vision.” 

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# Understanding trauma

## Study seeks better training for school security personnel

Researcher: **Dorothy Espelage**

Article by **Michael Hobbs**

Americans are regularly traumatized by school shooting massacres, a phenomenon that has pushed those who run schools to hire security personnel to protect students, teachers, and other staff.

But how do we bring police and security personnel into schools without introducing new traumas? How do security measures take into account that many students come to school scarred by histories of aggressive policing?

Dorothy Espelage, the William C. Friday Distinguished Professor of Education at the UNC School of Education, has led examinations of the effectiveness of school security personnel. She also has worked to develop training programs that help security personnel better understand the traumas many students bring to school, with the objective of creating environments that are better equipped to promote safety and a sense of well-being for all students.

### THE HARDENING OF SCHOOLS

Between 14,000 and 20,000 school resource officers are in service

**The Edge:** In response to a wave of deadly school shootings in recent years, schools across the U.S. have added school resource officers and other security personnel with the intent of improving safety. With the addition of police and other security personnel come concerns over how the presence of police affects students and school staff. Dorothy Espelage, a leading researcher on school safety issues, has led research evaluating the impact of the presence of police and security officers. Espelage has led a pilot study to develop and evaluate an online training program to instruct school security personnel to avoid adding to students' trauma.

nationwide, according to an estimate by the National Association of School Resource Officers based on U.S. Department of Justice data.

But there's been little study regarding how police and other security personnel who work in schools are trained, nor evaluation of training programs that can help security personnel be effective in promoting the safety and well-being of students.

Schools largely have adopted "law and order" approaches such as increased surveillance, referrals to law enforcement and other "hardening" of schools rather than adopting what researchers have determined to be proven violence-prevention strategies and public health approaches that



**Dorothy Espelage**  
William C. Friday Distinguished  
Professor of Education



seek to address root causes of violence (Nance, 2016).

Studies that have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of police officers who work as school resource officers (SROs) are mixed. One analysis using data from the 2010 School Survey on Crime and Safety found that having an SRO on campus is associated with higher rates of reported violence at schools (Swartz, et al., 2016).

Researchers have documented that harsher school discipline policies and police presence in schools do not make all students feel safer and can be doing some of them harm. Police presence and harsher discipline has contributed disproportionately to exclusionary discipline practices — in-school or out-of-school suspensions — and criminalization for students of color and for students with disabilities (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Curran, 2016; DeLaRue & Forber-Platt, 2018; Merkwae, 2015).

Additionally, because communities of color have long been victims of police brutality and other forms of aggressive policing, police presence in schools may be perceived as threatening the psychological and physical safety of students who come from those communities.

Could SROs and other school safety personnel be trained to be better aware of students' traumas and to better serve all students?

## **THE ROLE OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE**

A review of SRO programs found that few of the programs trained SROs before they started their jobs (Finn & McDevitt, 2005). Another review found

that 31 states do not require youth- or school-related training for SROs (Morris, Epstein, & Yusuf, 2017). Even less is known about training of non-police school security personnel.

And yet, SROs and other school security personnel are called on to respond to situations involving children and youth, some of them who carry histories of traumatic experiences. To better fulfill their duties, school security personnel need training on child development, trauma-informed care, restorative practices, and other topics that can help them support safe and caring environments.

Espelage recently led a project funded by the National Institute of Justice to create and evaluate a training program for SROs and other school security personnel aimed at helping them become more aware of and sensitive to the traumas many students bring to school.

Trauma is defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as being the result of "an event, or series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

Researchers refer to trauma in children as "adverse childhood experiences," or ACEs. ACEs may take many forms, including neglect, forms of abuse, witnessing violence, death of a loved one, having an incarcerated parent, or having a parent or caregiver with mental illness or substance abuse issues.

The 2011-2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System found that 61% of participants from 23 states reported having one or more adverse childhood experience (Merrick, Ford, Ports, & Guinn, 2018).

SAMHSA has developed a concept of "trauma-informed care" (TIC) that includes four assumptions that have become known in the field as the "Four Rs":

- **Realize**
- **Recognize**
- **Respond**
- **Resist re-traumatization**

For SROs, applying the "Four Rs" means they must 1) realize how trauma affects individuals, families, and communities; 2) recognize the signs of trauma; 3) respond by using a comprehensive trauma-informed approach; and 4) resist re-traumatization by mindfully avoiding potential triggers of past traumas (Espelage, et al., 2020).

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

Students who have been traumatized in the past may be re-traumatized by punitive consequences commonly used in U.S. schools.

Even the mere presence of SROs can be traumatizing for people of color who have had negative interactions with police. People who report more contact with police report more trauma and anxiety symptoms (Geller, Fagan, Tyler, & Link, 2014).

As part of the National Institute of Justice-funded project, Espelage and her team developed and evaluated a pilot computer-based training program



aimed at helping security personnel better understand trauma-informed care, along with modules that covered social emotional learning, restorative problem-solving, and cultural competencies.

School security personnel using the modules had significantly higher scores in an assessment of trauma-informed knowledge and competencies compared to participants in a control group (Espelage, et al., 2020).

One participant wrote: "OMG. This information makes me feel guilty about the way I deal with students. I had no idea about some of the trauma. This [training] will help me in the performance of my duties."

Another said: "The role of an SRO has nothing to do with being soft. Neglecting to meet that child's needs to address his trauma can jeopardize the safety of the child as well as everyone in the school. An SRO wears various hats during our daily functions in the school, and we must be caring, patient, involved, work to build relationships with students based on trust, listen to them, try to work with them to get to the root of their feelings/problem or get them the professional help they may need (even when the outcome may not be favorable to them but we must try.)"


## FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDED

Espelage and her team said further research is needed to replicate their findings with larger populations. But, they said, the study indicates that school security personnel are amenable to computer-assisted professional development experiences, and that they demonstrated greater knowledge and competencies regarding trauma-

informed care after completing the modules.

Additional work is needed to develop deeper understandings of the experiences, needs, and skills of people who are hired to serve as SROs or school security personnel. Espelage and her team found a dearth of information on the types of training available for SROs and school security personnel, implying a lack of structure around the supports available to them.

Future reforms may soften some of the hardening of schools and provide more resources for already proven strategies to assist students, especially those from minority and other under-served

populations. But the study found that SROs and other security personnel benefited greatly from learning about trauma-informed care, expressing new strategies they intended to use in schools and feeling better equipped to support students with histories of adverse childhood experiences and other traumas. 

*Funding Source: This work was funded with a grant from National Institute of Justice (2017-CK-BX-0019) to Dorothy Espelage (PI). The findings and conclusions in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the National Institute of Justice.*

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# Partnerships play key role helping students of color

Researcher: **Dana Griffin**  
Article by **Michael Hobbs**

**E**ducators, and especially school counselors, can help Black, Latinx, and other students of color overcome educational opportunity gaps by developing and sustaining meaningful and effective partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

Research, including work by Dana Griffin, associate professor of school counseling at the UNC School of

Education, has demonstrated that greater levels of parent and family involvement in schools supports greater academic success among those schools' students. School counseling research has examined school-family-community partnerships, a 20-year body of work that has outlined the benefits of these collaborations. The American School Counselor Association's National Model makes it clear that building partnerships is a vital role for school counselors.

Griffin advocates for a need to

consolidate and synthesize a variety of approaches and practices into a school-family-community partnership building process that is effective at helping address the opportunity gaps faced by students of color.

## **BRIDGES TO THE SCHOOL**

For many families who have concerns or questions about schooling, school counselors serve as an early point of contact. School counselors serve as bridges to the school for these families and other community members, often



playing the role of cultural brokers and liaisons to connect families to needed services within schools.

School counselors are often encouraged — by their principals, by research findings, and by ASCA — to develop partnerships that can sustain the bridge-building work. Despite the importance of developing partnerships, only about 40% of school counselors report being involved in that work. School counselors are often overwhelmed by non-counseling tasks and responsibilities, having little time to devote to building partnerships.

However, school administrators, policymakers, and educators need to recognize that school-family-community partnerships can empower marginalized students and families, creating social capital that can be used

**The Edge:** Black, Latinx, and other students of color have long faced gaps in educational opportunity, gaps that have resulted in lower rates of academic achievement when compared to White students. Educational researchers have identified that strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities can help bridge the opportunity gaps faced by students from minority populations. Dana Griffin, associate professor of school counseling, has conducted research on school-family-community partnerships, promoting a series of strategies through which educators can establish effective collaborations that support academic achievement among marginalized students.

to solve problems and foster students' educational success, Griffin says.

Discussions about family involvement should be expanded to provide explicit acknowledgement and understanding of how marginalized parents and family members are already involved in their children's education. With this understanding, educators and counselors can shift away from a deficit perspective of parents' interest and involvement in their children's education to an appreciation for the ways in which they contribute to their children.

#### **FOUR STEPS TO EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS**

It's vitally important that given the increasing diversity of schools that any school-family-community partnership has a focus on equity and a social justice approach to collaboration. School counseling research points to several critical strategies and roles for school counselors who wish to build partnerships that empower marginalized students and family members (Bryan, J., Griffin, D., et al., 2019).

**Lead school personnel in using culturally congruent, nontraditional partnership strategies.** School



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Associate Professor  
of School Counseling and  
Dean's Fellow for Diversity,  
Equity, and Inclusion

counselors can play the leading role in implementing culturally appropriate strategies to reach and engage marginalized families and communities. For an example, partnerships with Black families work best when school counselors incorporate empowerment

principles and outreach, embedding the partnership with Black community members who can serve as cultural brokers or interpreters. These principles also apply for other types of communities, such as Latinx ones.

**Serve as advocates and empowerment agents for marginalized families.** School counselors can serve as advocates and empowerment agents for low-income, minority, or other marginalized families and students whose voices often go unheard in schools. For example, research has identified the need for school counselors working with Latinx students and families to function as advocates with school personnel to help them understand Latinx families' perspectives and create environments where their concerns are heard.

**Build relationships with cultural brokers/interpreters.** Building relationships with individuals who can serve as cultural brokers and/or interpreters is a key strategy for school counselors seeking to build partnerships.

**Promote cross-cultural trust in school-family-community relationships.** Given their training in multicultural counseling and collaboration, school counselors understand how oppression and racism affect students and their families. School counselors can play a key

role in building understanding among other school personnel, a precursor to building cross-cultural trust between schools and families. Encouraging teachers and other school personnel to address their biases, understand white privilege, and dismantle white supremacy, as well as to see families through empowerment and strengths-based lenses can help them create and sustain a more welcoming and inclusive school culture.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, TRAINING

For school counselors to be effective in building effective partnerships, counselor-education programs must provide training on how to do so. Collaboration and partnership-building knowledge and skills should be more fully incorporated into school counselor training programs. Educator preparation programs should begin work within all training programs — for future teachers, administrators, and policymakers — so that they all appreciate the benefits of effective partnerships and can learn how to collaborate.

That training will also convey to pre-service educators and other stakeholders the value of partnerships, and the need to provide time and resources for school counselors to build those partnerships.

Further research is needed to evaluate

the effectiveness of partnerships, especially on how they can support students and families of color. It is imperative that to overcome the challenges students of color face, schools must work more effectively with families and communities to create equitable practices and provide expanded opportunities for all students.

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# Autism tools

## Rapid-response team helps often-overlooked group

Article by **Kara Hume**

**T**he COVID-19 epidemic is causing stress for many families as we all seek to create new and supportive home routines, while wrestling with the challenges of staying physically and mentally healthy and productive. Especially vulnerable are children and young adults with autism, as they are not receiving the everyday services typically provided in their schools.

In the spring when the pandemic first reached the United States, a team of experts came together, compelled by the realization that these children and young adults — along with their parents and caregivers — would need help. Many of us have years of experience helping families supporting individuals with autism. We knew from working with these families that many of them would need help they otherwise might not be able to find.

**The Edge:** When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, a team at UNC-Chapel Hill rapidly responded to a need for help in one often-overlooked student population: children and young adults with autism spectrum disorder. Relying on their years of experience working with children and youth with autism, the team put together a toolkit that families and caregivers could use to support individuals with autism. Since it was created in March, the toolkit and its elements have been translated into nine languages and downloaded 220,000 times.

It's estimated that U.S. schools serve 710,000 children and young adults with autism spectrum disorder. According to recently released statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among 8-year-old children, about 1 in 54 are identified as having an autism spectrum disorder.

The 60-page toolkit we put together — “Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times” — contains seven strategies designed to help parents and caregivers meet the unique needs of individuals with autism during



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Evidence and Practice

## The toolkits

**A toolkit for supporting children and young adults with autism is available here:**

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times>

**Another toolkit for people supporting adults with autism is available here:**

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/adult-resources>

this period of uncertainty.

Since we published the toolkit in March, it and related resources have been downloaded 220,000 times. It has been translated into Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Polish, Italian, Swedish, and other languages. It truly has gone global — all made possible because we had a team of experienced professionals who came together rapidly to respond to a clear need.

## THE STRATEGIES

Following are the strategies we designed. For each of them, the online toolkit contains more detail, examples, and ready-made resources to help individuals adopt the strategies at home.

### 1. Support understanding

Describe the virus, the epidemic, and your individual situation in concrete

terms, avoiding flowery language and euphemisms. Though stark-sounding, phrases like “The coronavirus is a type of germ. These germs are very tiny, and when they get inside your body, they can make you sick,” may be easier for individuals with autism to understand.

Use visual cues to demonstrate changing rules, such as how we greet each other and maintaining distance. Use visual cues to break down the steps of new expectations.

Offering visual cues such as a calendar to clarify the passage of time may be helpful, as individuals with autism may have trouble perceiving the passage of time.

### 2. Offer opportunities for expression

Children and young adults will likely have difficulty expressing how they feel about the many unexpected

changes. Consider providing multiple opportunities for family members to express their feelings as they are able, such as through family and individual discussions, writing activities, movie making, or play.

Support alternate forms of expression such as the use of alternative communication through tablets or pictures, listening to or playing music, dance, yoga, and various visual art forms.

Recognize that an increase in challenging behaviors may be an expression of anxiety or fear.

### 3. Prioritize coping and calming skills

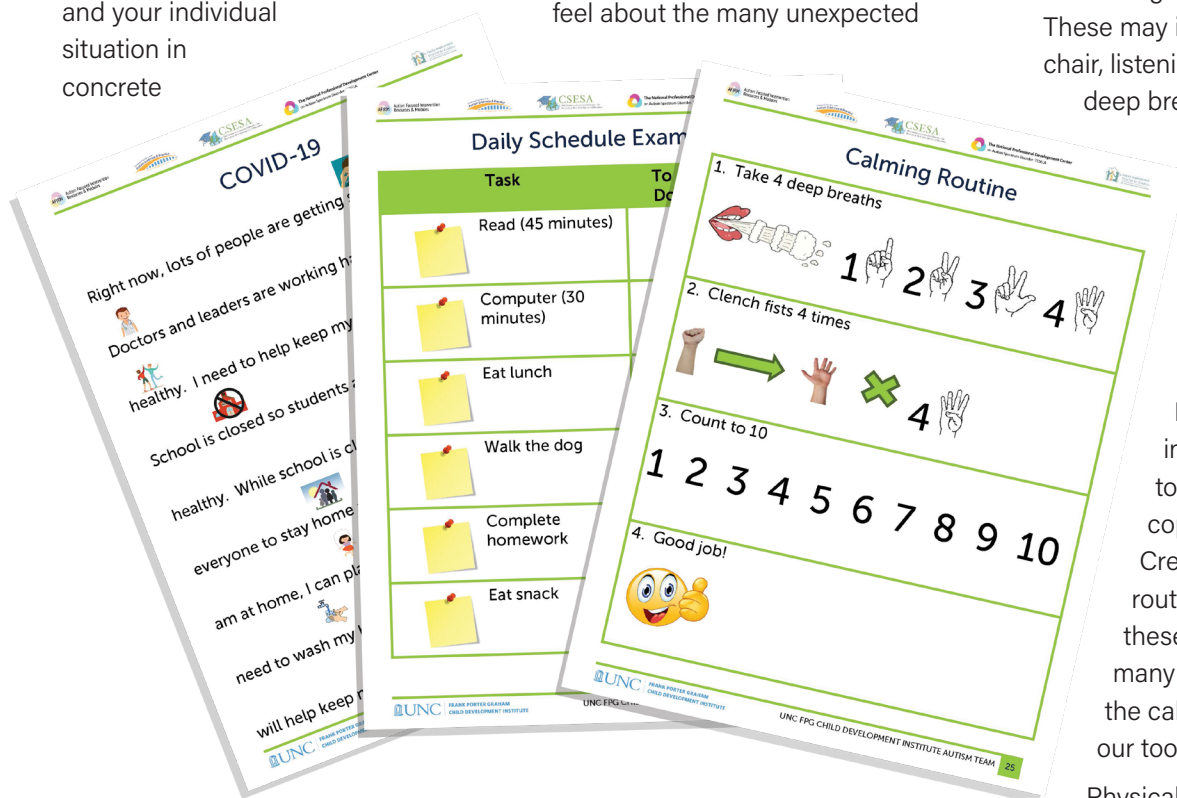
Ideally, individuals with autism already have some coping and calming strategies in their repertoire of skills to use during their most anxious times. These may include rocking in a rocking chair, listening to music on headphones, deep breathing, watching a

preferred video clip, brief periods of vigorous exercise, or accessing a favorite activity or material.

Caregivers can support the teaching of these skills. Find times of day when the individual with autism is calm to initiate discussion about coping and calming skills.

Create a concrete and visual routine to support the use of these strategies, such as use of many available calming apps and the calming routines available in our toolkit.

Physical activity and exercise is a proven strategy to reduce anxiety



The toolkits include guides to be used with individuals with autism.

# The team

**The team that put together the toolkits is connected through their ongoing autism-related projects housed at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute and includes FPG staff members Victoria Waters, Ann Sam, Jessica Steinbrenner, Becky Dees, Brianne Tomaszewski, Nancy McIntyre, Mary White, Sara Nowell, and Sam Odom. The team also included Yolanda Perkins of the School of Education, Susan Szendrey of UNC's Department of Allied Health Sciences, and Lindsay Rentschler, a doctoral student in the School of Education's Applied Developmental Science and Special Education program.**

symptoms with the broader population, as well as with individuals with autism.

## 4. Maintain routines

Work to maintain established routines where you can. Routines can provide increased comfort for individuals with autism and may allow them to better express their feelings related to the changes.

Try to stick to sleep and wake schedules, and routines around household chores. Expanding the use of a visual schedule — such as a calendar posted on the refrigerator or a list of chores — may help facilitate participation in activities at home and reduce anxiety.

## 5. Build new routines

It may be necessary to create new routines during this time, as there are many new demands of caregivers in this new situation.

Transitioning off screens after an

extended period may be difficult. Establish a clear, consistent, and concrete routine for this transition. Use visual cues such as a visual timer or countdown, which may be helpful for individuals with autism to see how much screen time remains.

Offer choices. Creating regular opportunities where family members have a voice about what happens and when it happens can serve as an effective anxiety-reducing strategy and a communication tool. These choices might include the route for the nightly walk, meal options, order of activities for the day, and/or preferences for activities.

Create a workspace with a to-do list. Individuals with autism may have difficulty using the strategies and skills they used in the school environment to the home environment. It might be helpful to establish a designated workspace to help clarify expectations and reduce distractions.

## 6. Foster connections (from a distance)

Individuals with autism are more susceptible to social isolation and loneliness, and this may be exacerbated by quarantine conditions. Individuals with autism may need more explicit facilitation to ensure that social connections continue.

Caregivers may need to check in to ensure social contact is continuing via text or direct messaging, and/or build in opportunities for daily social contact via technology with family, friends, neighbors, teachers, or others.


## 7. Be aware of changing behaviors

Individuals with autism may not be able to verbally express their fear, frustration, and anxiety.

Caregivers should be alert for signs of anxiety and depression. These may include a change in sleeping or eating patterns, increases in repetitive behaviors, excessive worry or rumination, increased agitation or irritability, or decreases in self-care.

If these behavior changes are observed, additional support from mental health and/or medical providers such as a family doctor, therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist may be warranted.

## A MENU OF STRATEGIES

These strategies are intended to be a menu of ideas that may be helpful. We designed these strategies so that caregivers may take one idea at a time and find a way to make them work for their children and their families. We urge those using the toolkits to involve the individual with autism in the decision-making process about what tools would be most helpful. 





## COVER STORY

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# The power of a Black teacher

**It takes just one to make a difference for Black students; directions for research, policy**

Researcher: **Constance Lindsay**

Article by **Michael Hobbs**

**B**lack students are not being served well by American schools.

Black students — and Black males in particular — confront obstacles in schooling that create opportunity gaps that too often lead to lower educational attainment. Those “achievement gaps” of shortened educational outcomes among minority students, when compared to their White peers, have been extensively documented.

And yet those gaps have persisted, in some part because the sources of the gaps are poorly understood.

A team of researchers including Constance Lindsay, assistant professor in educational leadership



**The Edge:** Educational researchers seeking to identify and assess interventions and policy changes that can help close educational attainment gaps have found growing evidence that having a Black teacher at least once in elementary school increases the likelihood that Black students — and Black males from low-income households in particular — will complete high school and aspire to attend college. However, the U.S. teaching workforce is vastly mismatched to the public school student population, with a trend of decreasing diversity among teachers while the population of Black and Latinx students continues to grow. Research conducted by a team including Constance Lindsay, assistant professor in educational leadership, describes positive long-term effects of having a Black teacher for Black males, pointing to possible policy prescriptions and areas of needed research. In addition, Lindsay has conducted research into race-match effects in disciplinary outcomes in schools and other work that suggests areas in which new effort is needed to widen the teacher-preparation pipeline to bring more Blacks into the teaching profession.

at the UNC School of Education, has found evidence that having a Black teacher has positive effects — higher educational attainment and lower rates of discipline — for Black students, with the strongest effect often among Black males from low-income households.

Lindsay, who joined Carolina in 2019, earned a doctorate in human development and social policy from Northwestern University, where she was an Institute of Education Sciences' predoctoral fellow. She received a bachelor's degree in economics from Duke University and master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University. Before doctoral study at Northwestern, she was a Presidential Management Fellow at the U.S. Department of Education.

Her research focuses on policies and practices to close racial achievement gaps in education, with a current focus on teacher diversity and how to obtain a high quality, diverse educator workforce. She is a co-author of the upcoming book "Passing with Flying Colors: How Promoting Racial Diversity in Teaching Benefits All Students," being published by Harvard Education Press.

### A DEMOGRAPHIC MISMATCH

Nearly half of students in U.S. schools are not White, while less than a quarter of teachers were people of color, according to 2015 data from the American Community Survey. The disparity gap continues to widen in many places and is particularly pronounced for Latinx students (Lindsay, Blom, & Tilsley, 2017).

Researchers have found evidence that this demographic mismatch can drive inequality in academic outcomes (Grissom, Kern, & Rodriguez, 2015). One study found Black and White children alike had significantly higher achievement when assigned to a teacher of their race. But because White students are far more likely to have same-race teachers, they disproportionately benefit (Dee, 2004). Many researchers have found that teachers of color produce more favorable academic outcomes — in the short run — for students of color in terms of standardized test scores, attendance, contemporaneous course performance, and suspensions.

Lindsay has explored this phenomenon, seeking to uncover evidence that



**Constance Lindsay**  
Assistant Professor of  
Educational Leadership

points to why race match between teachers and students matters, while also pointing to policy interventions and needs for further research.

### BENEFITS OF HAVING A BLACK TEACHER

A team that included Lindsay analyzed data from North Carolina and Tennessee — states that have robust longitudinal

statistical data regarding K-12 students, teachers, and schools — to find whether there were positive effects that could be tied to student-teacher race match that persisted over longer periods of time (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017; Lindsay, 2020).

They found that having a Black teacher for one year in elementary school raised long-run educational attainment for Black male students, especially for those from low-income households. For the most disadvantaged Black males, Lindsay and the team estimated that exposure to a Black teacher in elementary school reduced high school dropout rates by 39% and raised college-going aspirations.

The team analyzed student-level data from all public schools in North Carolina of students who entered third grade between 2001 and 2005, following them through their senior year of high school. The team also analyzed data from Tennessee's Project STAR, which produced data in an experiment to study the effects of randomly assigning students to classrooms of different class sizes.

The team used several statistical analysis techniques to attempt to reveal shortcomings in their findings, but consistently found positive effects, the strongest of which were among the most disadvantaged Black males. By analyzing Tennessee data, the team was able to ascertain that the uncovered effects were consistent among students in two different states.

Other highlights from the study:

- While exposure to one Black teacher in grades 3-5 had a meaningful effect on students' long-run outcomes,



## The research points to the need for strategic placement of Black teachers.

the marginal effect of exposure to a second Black teacher was relatively small.

- The lack of a “dosage” effect suggests an important policy implication in that the number of Black teachers does not need to be dramatically increased to take advantage of these effects. Efforts to match Black students — and especially Black males from persistently low-income households — with at least one Black teacher in elementary school can begin immediately.
- There was no effect of having a same-race teacher on female students' high school dropout rate, which researchers speculated may be a result of females' significantly higher baseline high school graduation rates.

Lindsay and the team suggest their findings point to the need for more research regarding:

- Greater understanding of the student or teacher behaviors that may explain the effect of demographic match. For example, teachers may affect non-cognitive skills not captured by standardized tests, with some teachers being better than others in

instilling a work ethic. Likewise, Black teachers may have higher educational expectations for Black students, fueling those students' aspirations.

- Additional study of longer-term effects, including college completion, courses of study, occupational choice, employment, and earnings. Evidence of increased income later in life tied to race-match effects from elementary school could help justify additional investments that would support recruitment of Black teachers and their assignment to Black students.

## RACE MATCH AND DISCIPLINE

Lindsay has extended her examination of the effects of race match, examining whether disciplinary outcomes are affected by exposure to Black teachers for Black students (Lindsay, & Hart, 2017).

Many studies have explored that Black and Latinx students are most frequently subjected to exclusionary discipline — in-school suspensions and suspensions from schools. Many studies have found that exclusionary discipline is associated with poorer academic outcomes, as well as other outcomes such as arrests and anti-social behaviors — the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

But few studies have assessed the role of teacher characteristics in determining disciplinary outcomes. Research has found that implicit bias among White teachers may drive more negative interpretations of behavior (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). A few other studies have found that Black students are less likely to be subjected to exclusionary discipline in schools with higher concentrations of Black

teachers.

But those studies relied upon aggregate demographic data, comparing overall discipline rates for minority students with the demographic composition of teachers in those schools, making it difficult to separate school characteristics that may explain varying disciplinary practices from teachers' behaviors.

Lindsay and Hart's study aimed at exploring the direct impact of teacher-student race match on disciplinary practices by studying within-school data. Only one other study Lindsay and Hart were able to find had taken this approach, but it relied on only one year of data from North Carolina (Kinsler, 2011).

Also using North Carolina data, Lindsay and Hart examined a broader range of students across more years and more grade levels from elementary through high school, enabling them to use more varied statistical analysis techniques.

Among the highlights of their findings:

- For Black students, exposure to a larger proportion of Black teachers decreases the likelihood of receiving exclusionary discipline. The effects were relatively small in magnitude but were consistent among a variety of grade spans and across multiple school types.
- Exposure to a large share of same-race teachers significantly reduced the number of reported incidents for Black students, particularly for the types of offenses that required subjective evaluation, suggesting that teacher discretion may play a role in those outcomes. Black teachers may be less

likely to make discretionary referrals for Black students for "defiance," for example.

- However, the reduction in referrals for violent incidents at the elementary level, in which teachers have little discretion in reporting, may suggest Black students have improved behavior when exposed to a greater share of Black teachers, at least for younger children.
- Non-Black students saw null effects in discipline outcomes from being matched with Black teachers, suggesting improvements in discipline outcomes from race-match among Black students do not lead to offsetting negative effects among non-Black students.


## POINTING TO NEEDED WORK

The study's results bolster findings that exposure to Black teachers for Black students has positive effects, pointing to the need for school principals and superintendents to strategically place Black students with Black teachers and for expanded efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching force.

Lindsay has given attention to impediments Blacks face in joining the teaching profession, with a forthcoming study that explores the role of student debt load in occupational choice, particularly in whether to pursue teaching careers.

Minority students typically borrow disproportionately more than their White and Asian peers, but little work has been done to determine how that affects the rate of Black college graduates going into teaching. Lindsay's forthcoming study points to evidence that for Black and Latinx students, larger debt burdens

seem to preclude them from becoming teachers, an effect that is not matched by White students and their debt loads.

More work is needed to understand the precise student and teacher behaviors that explain the positive race-match effects when Black students are exposed to Black teachers. However, there's growing evidence that having more Blacks in the teaching workforce is an important goal for policymakers, schools of education, and school district administrators and principals. 

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# Latinx students bring strengths into schools

Research points to ways educators can build on Latinx ‘cultural wealth’

Researcher: **Robert Martinez**

Article by **Michael Hobbs**



**L**atinx students accounted for more than half of the growth in the U.S. elementary, middle, and high school student population during the past decade. Latinx students make up over 27% of the U.S. school-age population, reaching almost half of all students in some states.

But the educational potential of Latinx students is not being met by our schools. How can schools better serve Latinx students?

One area of need: better preparation of school counselors so that they are equipped to serve the needs of Latinx and students of color.

Our higher educational institutions must dramatically improve preparation of school counselors and other educators, equipping them to employ culturally informed promotive and protective resources when working with students who face an educational system not created for them, says Robert Martinez, a Latinx researcher and assistant professor of school counseling at UNC's School of Education.

One indicator of how well we confront this educational-cultural collision, or *choque*, is whether high schools successfully prepare Latinx students to apply and transition to college, then persist and earn a college degree.

### SEEKING MORE EFFECTIVE LATINX SUPPORTS

Martinez is a first-generation college graduate and ex-foster youth who grew up in Los Angeles, the child of Latinx immigrant parents who did not finish high school. Now a researcher and teacher of school counseling, Martinez studies how school counselors and school counseling programs can

**The Edge:** Schools in the U.S. need to find ways to better serve the growing Latinx population. One approach calls for educators to recognize and build upon the "community cultural wealth" and "funds of knowledge" (*conciementos*) Latinx students and their families bring to schools and communities. Robert Martinez, assistant professor of school counseling, describes eight areas of strength (*fuerzas*) that Latinx students typically possess and suggests ways in which educators — and school counselors in particular — can build upon those strengths.

be more effective in serving Latinx and other minority and low-income populations.

Researchers, including Martinez, have identified that Latinx first-generation students face significant inequalities when they seek to reach and complete postsecondary education. More work is needed for school counselors to adopt a cultural lens that helps them identify and implement ways to help these often-overlooked students overcome the college readiness challenges they encounter (Martinez, Dye & Gonzalez, 2017).

Martinez has researched and identified approaches schools, and their school counselors, can use to better serve Latinx students.

### BUILDING ON LATINX STUDENTS' FUERZAS

Martinez describes the "community cultural wealth" and "funds of knowledge," or *conciementos*, that Latinx students typically have and encourages school counselors and other school staff to recognize those strengths — or *fuerzas* — and to work to build upon them. School counselors need to know that Latinx students come to school with multiple strengths,



**Robert Martinez**  
Assistant Professor  
of School Counseling

cultural assets, and cultural wealth that are built around those students' knowledge, skills, and networks.

These strengths often go unrecognized by school counselors and other school staff who perceive a "deficit model" when thinking about the abilities

and needs of under-served student populations, such as Latinx students.

Martinez advocates that educators use what scholars have described as a “critical race theory” approach to examining and addressing the issues that students of color and their families confront in their daily lives. A critical race theory — or CRT for short — approach accepts the idea that race and racism is a pervasive aspect and influence in American life and calls for scholars and others to identify racism’s influences and to seek to rectify them. CRT also calls for recognition of the knowledge and strengths people of color possess from having endured racism.

Martinez describes eight areas of strength that many Latinx students have and proposes actions school counselors may take that build on those strengths:

**Aspirational wealth.** Latinx students often develop the ability to have high hopes for the future despite the barriers they face.

School counselors can organize classroom guidance and/or group counseling sessions in which recent Latinx graduates enrolled in college talk about their experiences and answer students’ questions — all to build on students’ aspirational wealth.

**Linguistic wealth.** Latinx students often are able to speak more than one language, giving them ability to communicate in multiple and varied environments.

School counselors first should see Latinx students’ language skills as a strength, support efforts to build linguistic strength in English, and create

## Applying a ‘critical race theory’ lens

Critical race theory, or CRT, is a framework used by many scholars to examine culture and society, including its laws and educational structures. Drawn from the work of Black intellectuals and extended by a movement in American law schools in the 1980s, CRT is applied by educational researchers to examine the pervasiveness of race matters and the ways in which racism affect all aspects of schooling such as funding, disciplinary actions, testing practices, and segregation. Education scholars using a CRT approach challenge prevailing narratives of schools and question practices and policies that inhibit racial equality.

guidance lessons in the students’ native language.

**Social wealth.** Latinx students often capitalize on their social networks and from the lessons they learn from interacting with peers, especially those among other people of color.

Latinx students especially benefit from school counselors who provide them with vital information and assistance in researching and applying to colleges, doing so in a way that connects with the students’ passions and interests. Latinx students also particularly benefit from being connected with peer mentors once they enter college.

**Navigational wealth.** Latinx students have learned how to make sense of and to navigate in multiple, distinct worlds.

Latinx students would benefit from efforts to encourage college-going at early ages, beginning in middle school. Middle school teachers and counselors can work together to engage students in completing personality, learning, and interest surveys. They can cultivate students’ knowledge about their academic interests and strengths, forming a foundation for students to

begin college and career searches.

**Familial wealth.** Many Latinx students find strength in the support and guidance they receive through their families.

School counselors can take into account the particular importance of family for Latinx students. School counselors should advocate for dedicated time to build relationships with students’ families through meetings, phone calls, and home visits. School counselors can help build students’ visions of academic success, then work with families to connect students’ visions with the academic behaviors necessary to achieve those goals.

School counselors, along with teachers and other school staff, should become attuned to Latinx students’ feelings of obligation to their families and recognize that Latinx students often take on family responsibilities that can take them away from academic work. School counselors can stress with families the importance of students’ regular school attendance.

**Resistant wealth.** By enduring lifelong racial and gender aggressions, Latinx students often have developed skills to challenge academic and social obstacles.

School counselors can work to help Latinx students become more aware of their resistant wealth, helping them understand how to use it in pursuit of academic goals. School counselors also can work within their schools to identify and lower barriers that inhibit Latinx students' academic achievements by opening dialogue with school staff to help make them aware of underlying biases and to help make school environments more supportive of Latinx students.

**Perseverant wealth.** Many Latinx students have developed a strong sense of self-determination, self-reliance, and confidence that helps fuel pursuit of their goals.

School counselors can play key roles in helping Latinx students overcome inequalities they may confront in schools, and fill in for parents when they do not have college-going experience and knowledge. School counselors can facilitate college-going aspirations, especially among less advantaged groups, including Latinx students. Research has shown that seeing a school counselor to discuss college-related topics increased the likelihood of Latinx students attending two- or four-year colleges (Reigel-Crumb, 2010).

**Spirituality.** Latinx students often have a deep commitment to their religious faith, which provides them a source of strength.

Many Latinx students will talk about their faith and the strength it provides them. School counselors can support




## There is an urgent need to help Latinx students move successfully through middle and high schools, and to prepare for further academic pursuits.

this strength when they work with Latinx students. For example, school counselors can ask a focus question such as “Would you like to talk to me about your spiritual self and how it helps you with your academic aspirations?” Doing so conveys to students that they have the freedom to connect their spiritual selves to their academic goals.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELOR PREPARATION

More research is needed to quantify how implementation of these types of interventions affects Latinx student populations. Further research is needed to determine how school counselors, often laboring under heavy workloads, can implement these interventions into their schedules.

Martinez says there is an urgent need to help Latinx students move successfully through middle and high schools, and to prepare for further academic pursuits. Culturally responsive school counseling includes acknowledging, and building upon, the unique community cultural wealth of Latinx and other diverse student populations. 

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# Teaching in a troubled time

## Threading the needle of critical and trauma-informed teaching

Researcher: **Brian Gibbs**

Article by **Michael Hobbs**

**B**urning tear gas and swinging batons. “Black Lives Matter.” Marching for freedom. The life of John Lewis. The death of George Floyd.

Students come to school confronted and confronting: What does it all mean?

Teachers come to school confronted and confronting: What do I teach about what it all means?

### **FACING HARD HISTORY, HARD REALITY**

We live in a traumatizing time. We’re

**The Edge:** Teachers often avoid controversial and difficult topics. They fear alienating students which could threaten their jobs. Teachers also fear contributing to the trauma many students endure — racism, violence, over-policing. But today’s environment is bringing many of these topics into schools. Brian Gibbs has investigated how educators teach about tough topics, and suggests ways to guide students’ conversations.

faced with the images, the sounds, and the imperatives of turmoil as our society and our culture grapple with a widening recognition of a history and a present reality of racial and other inequities and how those inequities color our lives.

How do teachers teach about these

things? How do teachers pursue a teaching practice that recognizes that racism, homophobia, classism, and misogyny are a persistent presence in our society, one that worms its way into the fabric of our schools and classrooms? How do



teachers motivated by a social justice perspective thread the needle of teaching critically about our present realities without scarring their students with new harm?

How does a teacher teach “hard history” while living in a hard present?

Brian Gibbs, who teaches in the UNC School of Education’s Master of Arts in Teaching and educational leadership programs, has studied those questions. His research has been aimed at developing deeper understandings of how educators support and encourage students to wrestle with difficult subjects, how teachers may pursue critical pedagogy that acknowledges the harms embedded in our culture, and how to establish classroom environments of learning and healing where students feel safe to explore, struggle to understand, and learn how they might resist hard realities around them.

Gibbs taught social studies for 16 years in East Los Angeles before earning his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction with a focus on social studies education and critical theory from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Gibbs regularly gives presentations based on his research to educators on how to engage students in learning around difficult subjects and doing so in ways that recognize and appreciate the trauma many students bring to school and with an intention to avoid adding to that trauma.

He has studied how teachers in the rural South teach about the history of slavery and lynchings. He has studied how teachers in military towns — teaching to children of soldiers — teach about war.

## AVOIDING THE SUBJECT

In his research, Gibbs has interviewed teachers about the teaching of difficult subjects. Many teachers avoid tackling troubling topics. Some are afraid of reactions and pushback from parents and school administrators and the possibility of losing their jobs. Some worry that they need to adhere to curriculum standards that don’t delve into what may be perceived as sensitive areas.

Some are afraid of hurting their students.

Many students — especially students of color and from lower-income settings — come to school having endured trauma in their lives — such as physical and emotional abuse, racism, homophobia, the opioid epidemic, gang violence, and personal or witnessed experience of police brutality. The realization that educators need to pursue their work with the understanding of the trauma some students bring to school has gained wider understanding and study in recent years.

However, there is a lack of research into specific strategies educators can use to teach difficult and “messy” subjects to students who have endured traumatic experiences (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019).

Trauma-informed instructional practice (TIIP) includes a set of practices aimed at creating schools and classrooms that are safe and empowering for students. Researchers have advocated trauma-informed practices that are intended to look beyond students’ behavior, build relationships, create safe environments, and meet students where they are.

But in too many cases, professional development around trauma-informed



**Brian Gibbs**  
Clinical Assistant Professor

teaching practices offer definitions that are overly generalized and offer too little direction on how to implement trauma-informed pedagogy in classrooms (Gillen, 2014).

Gibbs has found that many teachers report feeling unprepared for teaching sensitive and difficult subjects (Gibbs, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

In three studies, teachers reported various ways in which trauma-informed instruction practices were poorly implemented in their schools. In almost all cases, TIIP was presented in a one-day workshop as a set of checklists for planning and instruction, with some focus on the trauma and social-emotional damage students often endure. But the teachers reported that at the end of the workshops they

remained unsure how to implement TIIP in a meaningful way.

Many teachers reported that because there was little effective professional development around TIIP, they felt it was being signaled that trauma-informed pedagogy was outside the norms of their schools.

In one of the studies, Gibbs analyzed data from interviews with teachers regarding the teaching about the history of lynching in schools that were near locations of historic lynching sites. Fear of causing trauma was particularly acute in racially mixed schools, with teachers afraid to exacerbate inherent racial tensions. As one teacher put it: "We teach about race and class and gender, but we have to have limits."

## LEARNING TO THREAD THE NEEDLE

But some teachers did tackle the subject of lynching, approaching it from a critical race theory perspective which acknowledges that racism exists and is common in the history of the United States, and by seeking to teach carefully toward a type of healing through empathy and understanding.

Teaching critically is difficult and possibly problematic. Gibbs found that due to fear of being punished, teachers who taught critically about lynching often did so surreptitiously, without seeking support and guidance from colleagues or community members.

Teaching critically, Gibbs says, can go wrong in many ways. A student could be triggered by discussions of race, gender, homophobia, poverty, or abuse, prompting an emotional response for which the teacher is not prepared. Such discussions could also be interpreted


by students as an invitation to air views that harm other students.

Gibbs offers recommendations:

**Offer more robust professional development around TIIP.** Teachers in his studies were in favor of trauma-informed pedagogy, but they generally disagreed about what that meant. Teachers need more professional development that can help them implement TIIP.

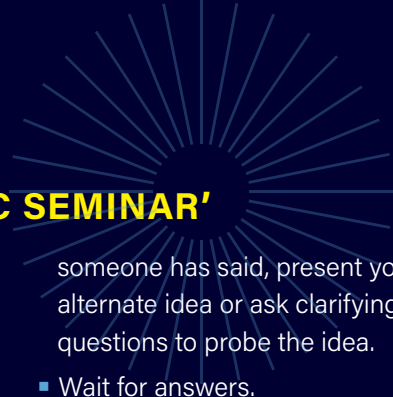
**Contextualize TIIP within lived experiences in the classroom, school, and community to address students' reactions to hard history.** Professional development can help teachers come to common understandings about trauma-informed instruction practices and make them relevant to their students' experiences.

**Be explicit and provide examples about how teaching critically works with TIIP.** Some teachers are unfamiliar with teaching with a critical lens so they may need more time and explicit instruction on how to connect critical teaching with TIIP. Time can be spent on specific issues that might be considered controversial within specific schools. This provides teachers clear signals about what can be taught and how.

**Take a long view.** Trauma-informed instructional practices should be an embedded part of professional development for an entire year, if not longer. Teachers need to be able to take time to learn how to do this difficult work, practice implementing it, reflecting on the experiences, and receiving feedback from administration and colleagues. 

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## HANDLING TOUGH TOPICS THROUGH 'SOCRATIC SEMINAR'

Brian Gibbs says teachers can guide students through discussing and learning from troubling material, discomfiting ideas, and hard realities. One method: Socratic Seminar.

Socratic Seminar offers a procedure through which students evaluate and question a text, then discuss their reactions and ideas with each other. Gibbs says: Teachers should assume difficulty and discomfort. Assume struggle. Students are often unused to engaging in rigorous discussion and may resist. Do not let this dissuade you.

The teacher serves as a facilitator, removed from the center of discussion. When it is done correctly, students talk, discuss, and share, with Socratic Seminar becoming a thoughtful examination of truths in a space of healing.

### Read a text

The process begins with the teacher reading a text aloud to students. The text should be worthy of critique, examination, and discussion. A commonly used text is Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*. Gibbs has often used the text *Passing* by Langston Hughes. Set during the Great Depression, the text takes the form of a letter written by Jack to his mother. Jack is passing as White; his mother is Black. In the letter, Jack apologizes for not speaking to her when he and his white girlfriend passed her on the street. The letter is rife with racism, the dislocation experienced by Jack and his family, Jack's own lack of understanding of himself, the presence of poverty, and betrayals.

Gibbs says it is a text that can be used to draw out student understanding of the violence and the threat of violence faced by Blacks.

### Engage with the text

The teacher reads the text aloud three times prior to the seminar.

Students should be given time to learn the text and to prepare their ideas about it. Have students engage in activities with the text after each reading. Suggestions:

- Find ten words you don't know and define them.
- Answer thought questions about the text.
- Develop five questions about the text.

Socratic Seminar is a place for students to interpret and critique the text and connect it to the questions and content they have been learning. They should know the words, know the text, and have thought deeply about the text prior to the seminar.

### Set up the space

Arrange the desks or chairs in a circle so that students face each other. All other materials are put away with the exceptions of pen, paper, questions, and the text.

### Establish an agreement on the form of discussion

Students are asked to agree to guidelines governing the discussion:

- Take turns to speak..
- Listen as someone else speaks and do not interrupt.
- If you disagree with something

someone has said, present your alternate idea or ask clarifying questions to probe the idea.

- Wait for answers.

### Begin the seminar

The teacher should be specific about what students are expected to do in the discussion. The teacher should have at least 20 open-ended questions that can be used to prompt discussion. There is no need to ask them all, but the more prepared the teacher is the more she or he can facilitate and react in the moment.

Be aware that it may take a few minutes for students to warm to the discussion.


The teacher facilitates discussion and does not lead students to conclusions, but provides students space to examine, explore, guess, change their minds, and grow. The teacher asks for clarity when needed, asking a question to move the conversation along, focusing student attention to particular parts of the text, often the parts that are difficult, push uncomfortable truths, and are ones that students may try to avoid.

Allot at least 15 minutes for the discussion.

End the seminar naturally prior to the end of class.

As students engage in more Socratic Seminars, they get better at doing it, often for longer periods of time with little teacher intervention.

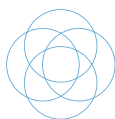
### Reflect on the experience

Have students engage in reflective writing about the text and their experiences in the seminar. 





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