

# Addressing the Racial Gap in Academic Achievement Through Policy

By Emily Reyes

In this paper, I investigate how certain policies impact racial inequities in education. Ultimately, I argue that many of the inequities in education are mutually reinforcing and can be attributed to inadequacies in policy. I primarily focus on seven policies by revealing their purpose and inadequacies: (1-2) The Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890, (3) The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill), (4) standardized or high-stakes testing, (5) zero-tolerance policies and maximum-security schools, (6) cost and fees, and (7) affirmative action. I argue that factors impeding academic success among disadvantaged groups mutually reinforce one another by creating a web of obstacles for these members. I propose three strategies to consider when cultivating and implementing policy: (1) high-quality teachers, (2) increasing diversity among teaching staff, and (3) smaller classroom sizes, all of which evidently increase academic success among disadvantaged groups by providing students with the resources they need for their development. I also argue that, in order for the above strategies to be effective, educational institutions should direct their focus to implementing well-designed race education, racial equity frameworks, and perspective-taking in order to arm themselves with

the capacity to cultivate racially conscious and inclusive campus environments.

## I. Introduction

A key obstacle impeding successful efforts to reduce racial injustice is the failure to distinguish impact from intent. Particularly in education, many policies that are said to be “race-conscious” fail to make meaningful progress in addressing racial inequalities in education and, in some cases, even increase racial inequality. Such policies struggle to positively impact the experiences of people of color in academic settings, even though they are “well-intended.”

Why is this so? If policy drives action or change, why are racial policies in education unable to mitigate or reduce racial injustices? Being able to distinguish impact from intent can help us determine which racial policies fail to make meaningful progress and how they might be reformed to be more successful. Where do these policies fail to produce meaningful change and how can we support these critical areas, so they can foster this change?

In this paper, I argue that the factors contributing to racial injustice in education are mutually reinforcing and driven by policies that ultimately exacerbate racial inequities rather than reduce the racial gap in academic achievement. Many current and former “race-conscious” policies fail to reduce this gap by diverting critical resources from high-need areas to predominantly white, affluent communities and fail to create supportive, academic spaces that promote growth and success for people of color. Understanding these policy failures is crucial to redressing them. I conclude by outlining educational strategies to help reduce the racial gap while also highlighting their current limitations and potential modifications. One key upshot of this discussion is that well-designed race education, racial equity frameworks, and perspective-taking are necessary conditions for implementing race-conscious policies and strategies to successfully reduce racial injustice in education.

## II. Policy Inadequacies

I begin by providing accounts of several “race-conscious policies,” highlighting their purpose and inadequacies in addressing racial inequities in education.

### A. The Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 allocated federal funding to institutions of higher education, so they can access land grants to expand their campuses as well as establish new colleges and universities. Since some states continued to adopt segregation, many black students were denied access to many of these land grant institutions. In efforts to mitigate this exclusion, Congress enacted the 1890 Morrill Act, which allocated funding for states to cultivate separate land grant institutions for black students. However, while these acts made it more accessible for black students to access these institutions, they failed to give these students equal opportunity to commit to highly respected careers, like becoming doctors or lawyers. Land grant institutions for black students primarily emphasized “mechanics, agriculture, and industrial fields.”<sup>1</sup> Here, we see that while the 1890 Morrill Land Grant Act attempts to grant black students equal access to educational institutions, a new inequality has developed: the racial gap in highly respected careers or fields. Rather than granting black students equal access to any institution they please, the more recent land grant act funnels black students into careers more in line with the trade industry. This makes it more difficult for black students to achieve upward mobility by limiting their opportunities to fields that struggle to bring in as much income compared to doctors, lawyers, or other prestigious careers.

### B. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill)

The G.I. Bill was enacted in efforts to increase opportunities for veterans to pursue their education by providing them financial benefits and subsidies. While the G.I. Bill successfully expanded higher

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel D. Museus, María C. Ledesma, and Tara L. Parker, “Systemic Racism in Higher Education,” *Racism and Racial Equity in Higher Education: AEHE* 42, no. 1. (2015), 50.

education campuses, it further exacerbated the racialized academic achievement gap among veterans. In fact, while “white veterans were much more likely to cash in their full benefits, veterans of color were often denied access to their subsidies...”<sup>2</sup> Moreso, many veterans of color who were able to attain their benefits were pushed into trade schools and less-competitive institutions of higher education (IHEs). This policy was meant to serve and expand education for veterans, but ultimately widened the racial gap in academic achievement by excluding veterans of color from full access to these subsidies and other financial benefits that would support their enrollment in higher education. Thus, we are presented again with a similar theme mentioned in the first two policies addressed in this paper: the act of funneling students of color into the trade industry and less-competitive IHEs. Students of color are restricted from equal access to institutions that prioritize their academic success and propel their students up the social ladder or, in other words, achieve upward mobility.

### C. Standardized or High-Stakes Testing

High-stakes testing can be described as the process in which educational institutions administer standardized tests as the determining factor in evaluating academic ability or achievement.<sup>3</sup> This process was widely implemented in many schools across the U.S. after former President George W. Bush’s launch of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), a federal educational reform plan developed in response to the disparities in academic achievement between white, affluent communities and members from disadvantaged groups who also struggle financially. In his educational reform plan, Bush attempts to mitigate these disparities by “using education funds as incentives for test performance.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than making the quality of education more equal across all groups, NCLB diverts funding from communities of

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<sup>2</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Tammy Johnson, Jennifer Emiko Boyden, and William J. Pittz, “High-Stakes Testing,” in *Racial Profiling and Punishment in US Public Schools: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Subvert Academic Excellence and Racial Equity. Research Report [and] Executive Summary* (Applied Research Center, 2001), 9-13.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 11.

color who already have less access to the resources essential for higher test performance to begin with. This is evident given that “the ‘rewards and sanctions’ that follow standardized testing disproportionately benefit white middle-class students and use scarce education tax dollars to widen the racial achievement gap in our public schools.”<sup>5</sup>

High-stakes testing also amplifies racially biased attitudes (ultimately contributing to institutional racism) by falsely affirming the belief that people of color are less intelligent than their white counterparts. The implementation of one of the first standardized achievement tests was developed by Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman, who assumed that he could reveal a link between intelligence and race.<sup>6</sup> This method of testing continues to be used for California students today. Since members of disadvantaged groups tend to do more poorly on these exams compared to white, affluent individuals, it is wrongfully assumed that white people are academically superior, rather than acknowledging members of affluent groups have more access to resources essential for academic achievement. When students do not do well on these tests, they are denied diplomas, promotion to the next grade, or placed in alternative programs, making it more difficult for these students to achieve academic success. In reality, standardized testing is a testament to differences in socioeconomic backgrounds and situations, despite being based on the assumption that all students are receiving equal access to quality education and developing at the same pace. It is a generalized measure that fails to account for students coming from a range of different social backgrounds, some of which hinder one’s ability to advance in education.

#### D. Zero-Tolerance Policies and Maximum-Security Schools

The zero-tolerance policy became widely implemented after the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) was enacted in 1994, an effort to protect school communities from violence after previous, more frequent incidents of mass shootings.<sup>7</sup> GFSA requires “a one-year

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Tammy Johnson, Jennifer Emiko Boyden, and William J. Pittz, “Zero Tolerance and Maximum-Security Schools,” in *Racial Profiling and Punishment*

expulsion for any student who brings a firearm to school.”<sup>8</sup> Following the enactment of GFSA, school districts allocated extensive resources to help boost security measures in schools, which led to an increase in police presence and surveillance on campus. While these policies are put in place to ensure the safety of others, they negatively impact academic achievement among students of color by expelling or suspending them at rates disproportionate to their white counterparts. Not only that, but the zero-tolerance policy has been expanded in many schools to include suspension for students missing class, arriving late to class, and instances of minor misbehavior or disruption of a class. According to Tammy Johnson, Jennifer Emiko Boyden, and William J. Pittz, “In 1998 while African American students comprised 17.1 percent of the US student population, they represented 32.7 percent of suspended students nationally. That same year white students compromised 62.7 percent of all students, but accounted for 49.8 percent of those suspended.”<sup>9</sup> These numbers represent a disproportionate use of punishment among students of color. Simultaneously, students of color are subjected to more severe forms of punishment than white students for the same “offenses.”<sup>10</sup> Maximum-security schools also contribute to the racial gap in academic achievement by making it more likely for these students to stop pursuing education entirely.

Consider an instance of excessive police presence in Albuquerque Public School, where officers were armed with taser stun guns, mace, and police batons. Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz suggest that these measures “put students of color at an academic disadvantage to their white counterparts, and as a consequence large numbers of youth of color fall behind, become more frustrated and drop out of school entirely.”<sup>11</sup> A possible explanation for this could be that students of color are more likely to be targeted for certain violations of school policies based on racial stereotypes and attitudes and removed from

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*in US Public Schools: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Subvert Academic Excellence and Racial Equity. Research Report [and] Executive Summary* (Applied Research Center, 2001), 14-18.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 17.

class as a result, which disrupts their education and makes it more likely for them to fall behind in school. This demonstrates how these issues are mutually reinforcing. As students of color experience higher rates of suspension and fall behind in their classes, they tend to do more poorly on their exams. As more students do worse on exams, schools are allocated less funding, which ultimately restricts them from accessing the necessary resources to help students from disadvantaged groups succeed in education. While zero-tolerance policies and maximum-security schools are meant to protect members of the school community from violence, they inadvertently make it more difficult for students of color to do well academically. Consider an instance in Bell County, Kentucky where a white student called a black student the n-word because the white student was dared by his friends. In response, the black student hit the white student which led to a physical fight. In this instance, the white student was suspended for one week, while the black student was suspended for two. This was justified on account that the black student-initiated physical contact with the other student. White students receive little to no punishment at disproportionate rates, which suggests that their academic success is prioritized over students of color. It also implies that white students are considered by the administration to be inherently “good” students with temporary lapses in judgment, whereas students of color are more susceptible to misbehavior and deserve more severe degrees of punishment in efforts to “correct” them. In this particular case, the administration failed to acknowledge “racial harassment and provocation on the part of the white student.”<sup>12</sup>

#### E. Cost and Fees

The high cost of higher education also has a large influence on the racial gap in academic achievement.<sup>13</sup> This results in any students of color taking out loans to help pay for their tuition, ultimately making it more difficult for these students to continue their education and achieve upward social mobility, since they are burdened with school debt. Even efforts to subsidize education, like the Pell Grant, do not necessarily make educational opportunities more accessible for

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker, 57

students of color, but rather make it more likely for IHEs to increase tuition and fees.<sup>14</sup> Performance funding and for-profit education also exacerbate racial inequities in higher education by creating incentives for IHEs to increase retention and graduation rates. This is similar to the policy discussed above (high-stakes testing) in that it shares a similar theme: the awarding of funding to institutions that are already doing well with regard to student success and diverting funding to the institutions in communities that really need it. This ultimately makes IHEs more selective, inaccurately assumes graduation rates are imperative to academic success, and fails to account for IHEs serving predominantly disadvantaged students with fewer resources and whose students have had less access to quality education.<sup>15</sup>

#### F. Affirmative Action

Affirmative action was enacted in response to former President John F. Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 but was applied to the higher education sector under the administration of former President Lyndon B. Johnson. This effort was developed to reduce racial discrimination and increase diversity in highly selective universities and college campuses by encouraging IHEs to look beyond students of color's test scores. Affirmative action also heavily relied on the notion of a "critical mass,"<sup>16</sup> which is the idea that students of color perform better in academic settings when they are surrounded by those that share their racial backgrounds. However, "...in the absence of a focus on reaffirming the role of affirmative action in combating systemic racism, critics of race-conscious admissions policies have engaged ideological narratives that promote color blindness and post-racialism to dismiss the role of racism in shaping college opportunity and contend that policies like affirmative action are no longer necessary."<sup>17</sup> When IHEs implement affirmative action and only focus on increasing diversity on campus, they fail to create academic spaces essential to the growth and success of people of color in these settings by subjecting people of color to racial hostility and mistreatment. Elizabeth

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<sup>14</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker, 59

<sup>15</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker, 60

<sup>16</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker, 56.



Anderson also reveals that affirmative action “can promote racial myths that may be stigmatizing”<sup>18</sup> and “invites the inference that the diversity represented by race is a matter of racially distinct cultures.”<sup>19</sup> Affirmative action also has the tendency to benefit the most advantaged members of disadvantaged groups, which is what Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò describes as “elite capture.”<sup>20</sup> Take former President Barack Obama as an example, who attended private and prestigious institutions that many children in his racial group did not have access to, which ultimately fostered his growth and overall success.

### III. Strategies for Reducing the Racial Gap in Academic Achievement

There are several strategies that can be used to reduce the racial gap in academic achievement, and when combined together, may produce successful outcomes. However, it is also important to note that large factors impeding their successful implementation are inadequate funding and resources. As I discuss in further detail below, we see here again the issues and inequities in education are mutually reinforcing.

#### A. High-Quality Teachers

Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz<sup>21</sup> highlight, “Teacher education, experience, and expertise are the most significant factors in student performance, outweighing race, income, or parental education level.”<sup>22</sup> Evidently, students tend to be more academically inclined in

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 142.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, “Identity Politics and Elite Capture,” *Boston Review*, May 7, 2020, <https://bostonreview.net/articles/olufemi-o-taiwo-identity-politics-and-elite-capture/>.

<sup>21</sup> Tammy Johnson, Jennifer Emiko Boyden, and William J. Pittz, “Proven Solutions: High-quality and Diverse Teachers in Small Schools,” in *Racial Profiling and Punishment in US Public Schools: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Subvert Academic Excellence and Racial Equity. Research Report [and] Executive Summary* (Applied Research Center, 2001), 19-24.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 19.

schools where teachers are fully certified combined with high-quality training. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for many US public schools given that one out of every four new teachers enter the field on an emergency or substandard license.<sup>23</sup> This contributes to the racial gap in academic achievement as increases of uncredentialed teachers are funneled into low-income areas largely made up of people of color and students whose first language is not English. We can take a closer look at educational reform efforts in Connecticut to increase and retain the number of high-quality teachers. There are six methods Connecticut implemented to increase the number of high-quality teachers: (1) made sure teachers know the subject(s) they will be teaching, as well as effective strategies to help their students learn (including students with developmental issues and English language learners), (2) increased wages and resources for credentialed teachers, (3) decreased incentives to hire uncredentialed teachers by awarding funding to administrations for hiring a more qualified teaching staff, (4) increased the availability of scholarships and forgivable loans to help support those interested in becoming teachers, (5) improved working conditions for teaching staff by reducing class size, allocating more time for professional development, providing more resources for learning and lastly, (6) provided opportunities for mentorship for teachers just starting out to increase confidence and competency, resulting in higher teacher retention.<sup>24</sup> As a result, school administrations were able to diversify their teaching staff and the number of teachers in fields lacking adequate support like math and science. These reforms decreased “attrition rates for new teachers by more than two-thirds, and helped teachers become competent more quickly.”<sup>25</sup>

This is not possible without the proper funding and resources necessary to support teaching and learning. When the state fails to allocate adequate funding to its school communities, institutions fail to hire and retain a higher quality teaching staff. As more uncredentialed teachers are circulated within this system, students struggle to perform well in the classroom due to a limited

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 21.

understanding of the subjects at hand. The cycle continues as more students fail to perform well on high-stakes tests, which results in critical funding and resources being diverted from these communities.

## B. Increase Diversity Among Teaching Staff

Increasing teacher diversity is another key factor essential to a student of color's academic development. There are several reasons to suggest this: (1) a diverse teaching staff provides examples to students of color of "successful, respected adults,"<sup>26</sup> (2) students of color (and even white students) tend to do better on reading and math exams, (3) teachers of color are more likely to continue teaching in urban areas, lacking adequate support than white teachers, and lastly, (4) teachers who share their students' racial background can connect better with their students and their families, making both parties more likely to be invested in their academic success.<sup>27</sup>

## C. Smaller Class Sizes:

Smaller class sizes are also fundamental to students of colors' academic achievement. Consider Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education program dedicated to reducing class size by prioritizing "overcrowded, underperforming, low-income schools over affluent suburban districts."<sup>28</sup> The program primarily focused on first and third graders and as a result, third grade African American students did better in school than students whose class sizes remained the same. If not carried out appropriately, however, class size reduction can result in a reduction of fully certified teachers in underprivileged communities. This is evident in consideration of California's class size reduction program, which pushed efforts to reduce class size among affluent and low-income areas. This led to an increase in the rate of transfer among teachers from underperforming schools to higher-performing, affluent districts.<sup>29</sup> Providing incentives and funding for teachers to remain in underperforming schools could mitigate this high rate of transfer. By doing this, students from

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, Emiko Boyden, and Pittz, 23.

disadvantaged communities will receive adequate academic support due to a decrease in high teacher turnover rates, ultimately allowing schools in these communities to better serve and accommodate their students.

#### IV. The Importance of Race Education and Racial Equity Frameworks

These policies and strategies also reveal that there is a critical missing piece essential to their successful implementation: well-designed race education. Race education can be utilized in IHEs to 1) shed light on how these systems oppress people of color and 2) offer guidance on how to apply effective strategies that will work to reduce the gap in academic achievement among students of color.

Critical race theory (CRT) does an important job in educating others on the experiences and oppression of people of color. CRT 1) reveals that racism is normalized in American society, 2) challenges dominant ideologies that work against people of color and are maintained by white supremacist notions, 3) places focus and particular priority on the historical contexts that shape racial attitudes, 4) highlights how people of color offer experiential knowledge<sup>30</sup> necessary in understanding how race and racism exist in society, 5) can be applied to many other contexts and institutions, and lastly, 6) is committed to eliminating racial oppression among people of color.<sup>31</sup> There are many other theories that go beyond the black and white binary heavily emphasized in CRT: Latina and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), and Native Hawaiian Critical Theory (KanakaCrit), which are equally fundamental to addressing racial injustice in education. The use of these frameworks allows people of color to be included in the conversation regarding their oppression in academic contexts, reject dominant ideologies in IHEs that subordinate people of color, and reflect on how IHEs perpetuate the oppression of people of color.

There are also several frameworks that can be implemented to help IHEs address racial inequities in higher education. The Campus

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<sup>30</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker. "Racial Frameworks," 18.

<sup>31</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker. "Racial Frameworks," 18.

Climate for Diversity framework addresses the negative experiences of students of color in racially hostile, campus climates by revealing that IHEs should increase diversity among staff, students, and faculty, create more “positive, interracial interactions among college students,”<sup>32</sup> and strengthen the campus community’s views on the current racial climate on campus, which would ultimately attract more people of color onto campus. This is relevant as many college campuses attempt to recruit more students of color but fail to have a diverse staff to help accommodate these students, ultimately hindering their ability to attain academic success.

Another framework is regarded as “The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model,” which works to create a campus culture that echoes various racial backgrounds. According to the National Institute for Transformation and Equity, the CECE Model, “is derived from three decades of published research in higher education, over 180 interviews conducted across several qualitative studies, and the findings of many quantitative analyses that examine the experiences and outcomes of diverse college students.”<sup>33</sup>

There are nine factors essential to its implementation. The first indicates that students should be given ample opportunity to connect with faculty, staff, and other classmates who share the same racial backgrounds. The second suggests that IHEs increase opportunities for students to learn about their culture and its history. The third emphasizes that students should be given opportunities to engage in community service projects that help benefit their respective communities and culture. The fourth reveals that IHEs should cultivate programs that focus on “cross-cultural interactions,”<sup>34</sup> and “solving real social and political problems.”<sup>35</sup> The fifth asserts that IHEs must recognize and acknowledge various racial groups on campus. The sixth recognizes that IHEs must place priority on “collectiveness,” rather than the individual to facilitate teamwork on campus. The seventh states that students should be given the

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<sup>32</sup> Museum, Ledesma, and Parker. “Racial Frameworks,” 30.

<sup>33</sup> “The CECE Model,” National Institute for Transformation & Equity, accessed Oct. 13, 2021, <https://nite-education.org/the-cece-model/>.

<sup>34</sup> Museum, Ledesma, and Parker. “Racial Frameworks,” 33.

<sup>35</sup> Museum, Ledesma, and Parker. “Racial Frameworks,” 33.

opportunity to develop positive relationships with faculty and staff dedicated to helping their students succeed in academic settings. The eighth contends that faculty and staff should provide students with “important information, opportunities, and support services to students, rather than waiting for students to seek them out or hunt them down.”<sup>36</sup> Lastly, faculty and staff should provide “holistic support”<sup>37</sup> for obstacles students of color may experience.

In short, this framework suggests that college campuses should encourage dialogue that prioritizes the needs of various racial groups. They must also critically evaluate their campus environments through a racially inclusive lens. In doing so, campuses will be able to assess how and what areas require more effort, allowing them to develop targeted plans to increase academic success among disadvantaged groups. By implementing the above, campuses will be able to cultivate environments that allow various racial groups to succeed in academics, since they start to become more racially aware and inclusive, allowing them to tend to the needs of students of color.

However, people that spend their time attending diversity workshops and reading critical race theories are not entirely aware of how their behavior and actions impact people of color. In other words, there are many cases where exposure to critical pedagogies is not enough to warrant racially considerate behavior. In many instances, such pedagogies fail to provide any real guidance on how one ought to interact with various racially distinct groups in a positive manner. This is largely recognized by Dr. Rubocalba<sup>38</sup> during our discussion about the experiences of faculty of color, as she highlights a particular situation during a committee meeting. Dr. Rubocalba recently had to serve on a search committee where she was the only faculty of color there and ended up having to prove her experience to a group of white women who served as “racial equity liaisons.” One of the women remarked that she had only seen Dr. Rubocalba in a few chair meetings and that she must be new to this position. In response, Dr. Rubocalba testified to her experience by revealing that she has maintained this position for eight years. The committee members chuckled

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<sup>36</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker. “Racial Frameworks,” 33.

<sup>37</sup> Museus, Ledesma, and Parker. “Racial Frameworks,” 33.

<sup>38</sup> The name of the professor has been changed to protect their identity.

uncomfortably and moved on to the meeting agenda. Instead of shrugging it off, Dr. Rubocalba decided to email the committee member and tell her about her experience during that meeting and how it was what she described as a “nightmare for a faculty of color.” In this instance, Dr. Rubocalba recalls that she felt like she had to defend herself even though she had more experience serving as chair than the rest of the meeting attendees. She also highlighted that none of the members had to testify to their experience. She explicitly stated that she felt like she was being treated as the “low man on the totem pole.” Dr. Rubocalba offered her perspective on how the actions of this committee member impacted her in a harmful way, as a faculty member of color. This issue is addressed by Alex Madva in the notion of “the power of perspective;” Madva writes, “Part of what makes approach and common-ground mindsets effective is their ability to prompt *perspective-taking* across group boundaries.”<sup>39</sup> In order for others to be more aware and considerate of racial issues in education, individuals in positions of power should engage in direct interaction with diverse people who are willing to share their perspective.

It is important to recognize, however, that people of color are not obligated to share their perspectives under these circumstances, and in doing so, should be compensated with the appropriate wages for engaging in this process.<sup>40</sup> When an individual shares their perspective, they essentially have to defend why their experience is valid, which sets the individual up for conflict and/or potential hostility. At the same time, this process also requires mental preparation on how one ought to deliver their perspective, as well as being able to anticipate a negative or dismissive response. Moreso, offering one’s perspective is a complex process that requires deep thought and evaluation about how a particular situation made someone feel. This process can be quite taxing on an individual depending on the severity, frequency, and level of trauma experienced from the situation(s). To successfully employ the above strategies, one must not only acknowledge that, for a person of color, offering their perspective takes a considerable amount of mental work, but that this work is valuable when it comes to reducing

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<sup>39</sup> Alex Madva, “Individual and Structural Interventions,” in *An Introduction to Implicit Bias: Knowledge, Justice, and the Social Mind*, eds. Erin Beeghly and Alex Madva (New York: Routledge, 2020) 244.

<sup>40</sup> Katherine Gasdaglis, Discussion with faculty advisor, 2021.

racial inequities in education. However, it is not enough to offer wages as means of testifying to the value of one's work in offering their perspective. During my discussion with Dr. Rubocalba, she also highlighted that she had lived most of her life with people asking her what it's like to be a person of color but never feeling like people truly acknowledged or realized how the harmful implications of her experience impacted her specifically. In reality, Dr. Rubocalba's testimonies were used to serve others on their path to being more racially conscious without really validating her experience as a person of color. Compensation is significant, but validation of one's individual experiences is just as important in creating a supportive, holistic campus environment for members of various racial groups.

There are several studies that demonstrate perspective-taking is effective. One study examined the effects of an online "choose-your-adventure," game where Hungarian young adults were able to put themselves in the shoes of a Hungarian Roma minority. This study showed that participants demonstrated "less anti-Roma prejudice, as well as less prejudice toward another social group (refugees) who were not mentioned in the game."<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, perspective-taking interventions are essential to reducing racial bias and increasing awareness of the racial inequities students and faculty of color experience on a day-to-day basis. Madva reveals that by engaging in the perspective-taking process, one attempts to "occupy people's points of view in order to understand their perspective."<sup>42</sup> This allows for more positive interactions with members outside one's specific racial group, which ultimately allows students and faculty to continue their journey in education in a positive, meaningful way.

## V. Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, students of color fail to receive adequate attention essential to their academic growth and success due to unsuccessful efforts in policy, which ultimately neglects students of color because they are primarily facilitated by white, affluent groups with priorities in preserving power, status, and opportunity for the white majority.<sup>43</sup> A

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<sup>41</sup> Madva, "Individual and Structural Interventions," 244.

<sup>42</sup> Madva, "Individual and Structural Interventions," 244.

<sup>43</sup> "The CECE Model," 52.



large part of the negative experiences among students of color in academic settings can be attributed to racial hostility and lack of support specific to students with certain racial backgrounds. This applies to teachers and faculty of color as well. Such negative experiences operate in a pattern of mutual reinforcement by building upon one another and increasing the racial gap. Providing adequate support and incentives for decreasing classroom sizes, increasing the amount of high-quality teaching staff, and diversity among the teaching staff, administration, and the student population prevents such instances from occurring by allowing campus constituents to cultivate more positive relationships among one another. However, we must also focus on the implementation of race education, racial equity frameworks, and perspective-taking to make academic spaces more worthwhile and engaging for people of color.

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