

Making Space for Us:
Adult Behavior Change Rooted in
Racial Justice

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1 Background & Methodology

This report explores what models rooted in racial justice can teach us about shifting adult behavior and/or promoting asset-based* learning conditions in classrooms

Research questions

What does it mean for organizations serving students to be rooted in racial justice?

What can we learn from models rooted in racial justice as it relates to shifting adult mindsets and behaviors?

What can we learn from models rooted in racial justice as it relates to promoting asset-based* learning conditions or learning environments in classrooms?

To inform our findings, we conducted desk research and interviews with staff and partners at four school support organizations rooted in racial justice



Kingmakers of Oakland is an organization that wants to “significantly increase belonging, cultural identity, academic achievement, and SEL outcomes aligned with [asset-based] learning conditions for African American middle and high school students through access to rigorous culturally sustaining coursework at scale”



Exalt Youth (*exalt*) is an organization that seeks “to transform the lives of court-involved youth by equipping them with the skills and experience necessary to become self-sufficient members of society”



LiberatED is a fiscally sponsored project at National Equity Project that “centers healing, justice, and radical love in social and emotional learning (SEL) to create a world where all children and youth live, learn, and thrive in the comfort of their own skin”



Beloved Community is a nonprofit consulting firm that is focused on equipping schools and organizations with the information and strategies needed to dismantle failing systems and replace them with people-centric processes to ultimately build sustainable change

2 Context

To best understand the work and foundations of these organizations, we need to contextualize their work and our research findings within the broader society, our education system and most specifically the SEL field

Contextualizing our research



Broader society

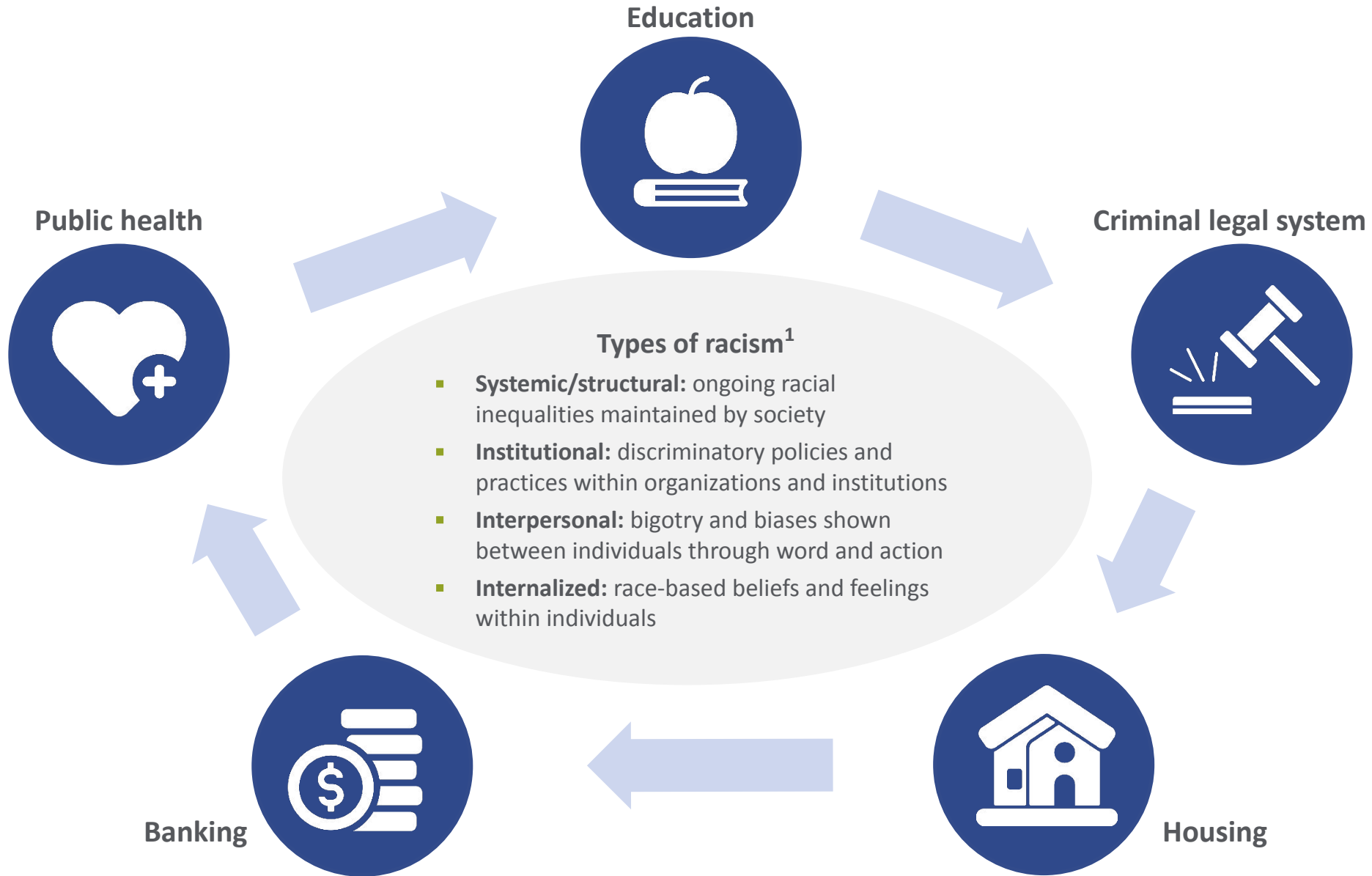


Education system



SEL field

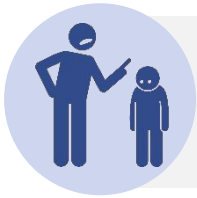
Racism is a persistent force that affects all aspects of society



In education, this plays out in a myriad of ways as evident through longstanding inequities, some of which are listed here



Fundings: Many studies show how race is related to inequitable education funding formulas and practices. One study found that “predominantly white school districts get \$23 billion more than their nonwhite peers, despite serving a similar number of children”¹



Disciplinary actions: “Racially disproportionate disciplinary exclusions persist and have insidious consequences for academic opportunity” with teachers referring “Black and white students differently for the same kind of misbehavior”²



High-quality educators: Students of color are more likely to attend schools with greater numbers of inexperienced or novice teachers than their peers. Furthermore, educator biases affect the quality of instruction with one study finding that “classrooms taught by the same teacher with higher percentages of Black and Latinx students receive lower quality of teaching”³



High-quality curriculum and advanced courses: Oftentimes, students of color have less access to high-quality curriculum than their peers and even when they do have access to so-called high-quality curriculum, these materials mostly represent White voices than BIPOC ones. Furthermore, Black and Latino students are under enrolled in advanced courses like AP STEM classes⁴



Higher education: Racist admission policies have historically excluded students of color. Furthermore, “nationally, white students at public colleges are two and a half times more likely to graduate than Black students, and 60 percent more likely to graduate than Latino students”⁵

COVID-19 and uprisings against racial violence have further amplified these longstanding inequities



Academic outcomes: Based on Fall 2021 student assessment data, “students remain behind in both math and reading. Students in majority-Black schools remain five months behind their historical levels in both mathematics and reading, while students in majority-White schools are two months behind their historical levels, widening pre-pandemic achievement gaps”¹

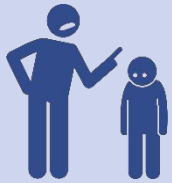


Access to learning: During the height of COVID-19, Black and brown students were “more likely to remain remote and less likely to have access to the prerequisites of learning—devices, internet access, and live contact with teachers”²



Impact on mental health and wellness: In many studies that considered the “differential impacts [on mental health and well-being of young people during the past few years], negative effects were more pronounced for girls and for young people from marginalized groups, including immigrants, LGBTQ youth, young people of color, and those living in low-income households”³

More specifically within the field of education, racism may also permeate and affect approaches to SEL



Form of control: Many SEL competencies often hyper-focus on students and how they “must manage and control themselves and their emotions...this narrative is troubling because we see the same policing aspects of physical violence shift to more covert forms of emotional and psychological violence and control”¹



Reinforce white dominant culture: In some instances, SEL is used as a vehicle to “assert colorblind and identity neutral principles and values” which leads to reinforcing white dominant culture. This is concerning as it actively suppresses understandings of social identities, systems of power and other sociopolitical considerations²



Onus on student, rather than environment: When SEL is approached as solely a matter of student-level skills without also “examining and changing the system level conditions in which students are being asked to learn and practice SEL,” it perpetuates the insidiousness of racism by placing an undue level of responsibility upon individuals rather than the environment³

In response, researchers and practitioners are engaging in critical discourse around SEL born out of an understanding of the impact of racism and a desire to reimagine a high-quality education, particularly for Black and brown students

Researchers and practitioners use a wide range of terms to describe SEL that explicitly, though to varying degrees, addresses racism*

Abolitionist SEL

Anti-racist SEL

Culturally sustaining SEL

Culturally affirming SEL

Trauma-informed SEL

Transformative SEL



The recent proliferation of these SEL approaches is a marked difference from the state of the SEL field in 2017, where a review of 136 SEL frameworks found that fewer than one in five (20%) considered the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals and groups while fewer than one in ten (10%) demonstrated sensitivity to trauma and adversity¹

3 Main Learnings

The organizations we researched are directly addressing racism and reifying the principles of an asset-based learning environment, particularly for Black and brown students*



Kingmakers of Oakland is an organization that wants to “significantly increase belonging, cultural identity, academic achievement, and SEL outcomes aligned with [asset-based] learning conditions for African American middle and high school students through access to rigorous culturally sustaining coursework at scale”



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These organizations share some broad characteristics that reflect their racial justice foundations



BIPOC leadership: All four organizations are led by people of color, with three being led by women of color specifically. Furthermore, most of these organizations' founders state that the impetus for their work is in direct response to a specific traumatic and racist experience*



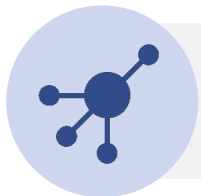
BIPOC staff: Most are staffed by BIPOC team members with significant male representation in half of the organizations



Target audience: These organizations speak of their work as a direct response to the fact that many systems, like public schools, were purposefully designed to oppress specific groups of students. Hence, they intentionally serve specific populations (e.g., Black and/or Brown students and court-involved youth) and/or regions (e.g., South, Midwest) where people experience multi-generational poverty



Operate at various levels of the system: Most of the organizations operate at various levels of the system from working directly with students and teachers to partnering with school and district leaders within, across and outside of the school day



Community-based: All four organizations have deep connections to the communities in which they work with most working within one or a few specific areas or regions

These organizations describe their work as being rooted in racial justice given their intentional, disruptive and action-oriented lens

Intentional

- Organizations rooted in racial justice prioritize racial justice throughout all aspects of their work from a targeted universalism lens

“But ultimately – we must address systems, structure, culture and conditions. Healing the fish while treating the toxic ecosystem. What lends itself to the toxic ecosystem are the conditions and culture that are euro-centric. The pedagogical approach, curriculum, etc. are harsh and not inviting to Black and Brown children. We must acknowledge the history of public school education - who it’s created for and what it serves now. The idea that school culture and conditions are toxic for BIPOC children.”

–Kingmakers of Oakland

Disruptive

- Organizations rooted in racial justice demand that the work itself is disruptive, from re-shaping mindsets to processes and beyond

“We’re not just going to problematize, we’re not just going to make people uncomfortable, we’re also going to do something about it. Disrupt, dismantle and abolish systems of oppression.”

–LiberatED

“We open our cohort sessions by stating that we do not believe that neutrality can be an option for organizations who are ready to commit to sustainable DEI solutions.”

–Beloved Community

Action-Oriented

- Organizations rooted in racial justice display this commitment through their actions, such as changing the ways adults relate to historically underserved students or applying an anti-racist lens to decision-making

“The 6-week training is preparation, because learning happens in the classroom but a lot of it happens through their experiences. I think this is why we’re successful as an organization – students have practice what they’re learning.”

–exalt

“In our model, we coach you on the doing. There is a need to coach leaders on how to *be* in the equity space.”

–Beloved Community

We identified five shared, guiding principles that illustrate how these organizations promote a learning environment rooted in racial justice

1

Historically marginalized populations have expertise and assets

2

The purpose of education and SEL should include a focus on racial justice and related components like healing and liberation

3

Community, safe from white supremacy and oppression, and authentic relationships are vital to learning

4

Adult mindsets and behaviors play a critical role in shaping the learning environment

5

Youth play an equally important role as adults in their own learning and development

For each guiding principle, we provide...



This icon is used to mark the description of the key guiding principles



This icon is used to mark examples of how these organizations live out each principle through their policies or practices

Organizations rooted in racial justice trust and honor the expertise and assets of historically marginalized populations throughout their work

DESCRIPTION



While these organizations acknowledge the undeniable impact of systemic racism, they simultaneously speak of youth and educators and their racial identities from an **asset-based perspective** such as highlighting their joy, beauty, brilliance, etc.

EXAMPLE:

CO-DESIGN



These organizations **elevate historically marginalized populations as experts and co-design programming and services** according to the needs of and in partnership with them:

- **LiberatED:** Seeing a gap in PD that does not currently center educators' voices, needs and experiences, they created their educator fellowship to be a model for how other content developers and district leaders can create PD experiences that center educators and students. Next year, in Year 2 of the fellowship, student fellows will join to co-construct learning experiences

“We have an approach to redesign public school systems that were never set up to engage and encourage BIPOC students...At every facet it elevates the beauty and brilliance of Black children...We have a systems approach that centers Black children who are the co-creators of what a system looks like and feels like in service of them.”

–Kingmakers of Oakland

These organizations affirm the expertise and assets of historically marginalized populations through their curriculum and products

EXAMPLE:

CURRICULUM AND PRODUCTS



These organizations' curriculum and products affirm and relate to their participants and elevates historically marginalized populations as experts:

- **Kingmakers of Oakland:** Through their manhood development program, students or 'kings' use affirming chants and learn from relevant content (e.g., The Autobiography of Malcolm X) which center the experiences and potential of a historically marginalized student demographic
- **Beloved Community:** One substandard that guides their work is "shared voice, shared power." That is, "To what extent does an individual, regardless of demographics or identities, have actual **shared voice and shared power**? To what extent do we create a space for all identities to advocate for themselves (shared voice) and to participate in decision-making for themselves and their community (shared power)?" Relatedly, in their Equity Audit, one of their indicators is "Do representative samplings of participants have opportunities to contribute to advisory councils that impact the services they receive?"¹

"We aim to disrupt what has always been and to co-create content and resources with communities so that, together, we dream about what could be. We want to ensure that process and practice are the core of our work—rooted in African and Indigenous wisdom. We want collective liberation."

—LiberatED

Organizations rooted in racial justice believe the purpose of education and SEL must include a focus on racial justice and related components like healing and liberation

DESCRIPTION



These organizations approach their work by asking questions such as “What does this human need?” and “How have our systems oppressed this human?” They hope to create **educational environments** that explicitly foster **racial justice** and related components such as **liberation, healing, hope, healing and equity**.

EXAMPLE:

MISSION OR VISION STATEMENTS



These organizations’ focus on racial justice and related components is reflected in their mission or vision statements:

- **Kingmakers:** We embody the metaphor “**healing** the fish by treating the toxic ecosystem”¹
- **exalt:** “We empower youth to see a future filled with **hope** – and we provide the road map to get there”²
- **LiberatED:** “A social and emotional learning approach to **racial justice and healing**. A movement. A collective. A path towards **liberation**”³
- **Beloved Community:** “When we are practicing the beloved community, we center love for humanity. Love as accountability. **Love as justice**. Love as community. Love as belonging”⁴

“We want to redefine SEL for today. How do we engage/ensure that SEL is relevant, applied, lived and realized in a sociopolitical context? [A vision of SEL that] centers healing, racial justice, social justice and radical love?”

–LiberatED

To advance high-quality education that achieves this greater purpose, these organizations strive to foster a learning environment rooted in racial justice

EXAMPLE:

ASPECTS OF A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ROOTED IN RACIAL JUSTICE



Many different frameworks seek to describe and measure the learning environment. However, these organizations do not use any one specific framework, but rather describe a learning environment rooted in racial justice in the following ways:

- **Physical needs:** Meeting basic physical needs, health
- **Emotional and mental well-being:** Belonginess, hope, healing, love, liberation
- **Relational well-being:** Community, family
- **Awareness:** Understanding “-isms”
- **Mindsets:** Adults as learners, high expectations
- **Actions (structures/practices/policies):** Modeling adult authenticity, creating anti-racist classrooms, creating learning conditions that do not artificially stop at the school wall, considering what the whole child and human needs to thrive

“I have my own take on SEL - and I am sure there is alignment, but I am not changing our language of how we talk about values into an SEL framework.”

–Kingmakers of Oakland

These organizations work to advance this greater purpose of education through their curriculum and program design

EXAMPLE:

CURRICULUM



These organizations explicitly address the historical and current realities of racism and other systems of oppression:

- **exalt:** One of the main content areas of their curriculum is focused on the school to prison pipeline which contextualizes the experiences of their participants
- **LiberatED:** They create activities for students that center racial justice, liberation and healing. For example, after students read a poem or book, some sample discussion questions include “Who determines what our history is (or isn’t)?” or “How can we cultivate a mindset of collective freedom”¹

EXAMPLE:

PROGRAM DESIGN



These organizations design their programs in a way that centers the direct advancement of racial justice and liberation and equity for historically marginalized youth:

- **Kingmakers of Oakland:** They believe that racial justice goes hand in hand with "anti-racism," and begin with this as the root of all their programming (e.g., providing access to rigorous, culturally sustaining coursework at scale, Black male teacher training, youth voice and leadership, family and community engagement, narrative change and policy advocacy). Across all their work, they affirm the Black students’ identities by using positive labeling and ultimately restore dignity, joy, hope and greatness
- **exalt:** They disrupt systemic inequities by working across systems to help youth avoid reconviction, successfully engage in education and increase financial stability. For example:
 - + Education system: by overseeing school transfers and preparing youth with Individual Program Plans
 - + Criminal justice system: through court advocacy work
 - + Economic systems: through matching youth with internships that provide stipends

These organizations intentionally incorporate the fact that community and relationships are vital to learning into their way of working

DESCRIPTION



These organizations are deeply aware that harm has and is happening to BIPOC people and that this harm is often systematized. This systematized harm must be disrupted and there must be consistent opportunities for healing and belonging.

Thus, they make space that is **safe from white supremacy** and oppression by creating community for both youth and adults where they have **authentic, trusting and vulnerable relationships** with one another.

The purpose of these spaces is to be a **respite from** unjust or punitive systems rather than a space to better manage how to navigate existing within these unjust systems.

These spaces not only allow for communities to be with one another safely, but they allow for these same communities to envision and develop plans for a more equitable future.

Community is both a noun and a verb, a concept and an action.

“All you have to do is give people an opportunity to have the space to express what they need. And simply to be who they are in the comfort of their skin.”

–LiberatED

These organizations prioritize and codify the importance of community and relationships through their dynamic, interdependent use of structures, practices and spaces

EXAMPLE:

STRUCTURES, PRACTICES, SPACES



The structures and spaces both hinge on specific practices implemented by these organizations; the structures make the spaces possible because of the practices and the spaces are connected to the structures through the practices

Types of Structures

- Brotherhood and Fellowship
 - Young men – called kings – gather to learn about different aspects of male identity
 - K-12 educators regularly gather to plan ways of integrating justice, healing and SEL into their lessons
- School/System-Level Change Coalition
 - Leaders from across different sectors of a region regularly meet to resolve interdependent equity issues

Examples of Practices

- Facilitators, usually BIPOC, guide participants in authentic and meaningful discussions about racial justice, equitable practices and healing
- Facilitators establish clear goals focused on catalyzing the power of the group to create (and act on) equity-based plans
- Facilitators cultivate trusting bonds
- Sessions feature data from the perspectives of those closest to the issues

Types or Characteristics of Spaces

- Mode: Virtual/in-person, curated, community and/or school-based
- Emotional: Safe, authentic, engaging and challenging
- Cultural: Affirming, centering and honoring
- Social: Intimate, guided, blended across differences (race, gender orientation, position, age and organization/industry)

These organizations have a deep understanding of the critical role adults play in shaping the learning environment and attend to this throughout their work

DESCRIPTION



These organizations are deeply aware that systems, like public education, have been designed to oppress historically marginalized populations and that adults play a critical role in either disrupting or upholding these inequitable systems through their **mindsets** and **practices**. Hence, they pay particular attention to developing equitable, racial justice-oriented mindsets and practices in their staff.

EXAMPLE:

HIRING



Most of these organizations are led or staffed by BIPOC team members, and prioritize racial justice-oriented mindsets in selecting who they hire:

- Adults are selected, in part, because they possess an anti-racist, culturally affirming mindset
- These organizations sometimes prioritize teaching candidates who embody the values of the organization over other credentials such as certifications, degrees or years of experience

“In our hiring process, one of my expectations is to model that. I open my interviews with my story. The good, the bad, the mistakes. To model authenticity. And deepness. So that folks feel comfortable sharing those things. Because in certain spaces we don’t always know if it’s okay to share these stories. We want to model that...”

–Beloved Community

These organizations create opportunities and provide resources for adults to engage in necessary internal work

EXAMPLE:

KNOWLEDGE-BASE



These organizations help adults develop sociopolitical consciousness through content and pedagogical knowledge building:

- *exalt* emphasizes the importance of their teachers understanding the ways race, class and the criminal justice system converge to create unfavorable conditions for Black males in society. During onboarding, staff read books such as *Just Mercy*, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *The New Jim Crow*
- Acculturating the educators to the unique methods and practices (such as affirmative chants and creeds) of the organization
- Pushing teachers to unlearn ideas of traditionally didactic instruction, shifting to a facilitated learning experience

EXAMPLE:

SELF-REFLECTION



These organizations engage adults in critical self-reflection. For example, *Beloved Community's* equity audit features questions intended to direct organizational leaders' mindsets and change efforts:

- Is our internal and external language inclusive of the communities we serve?
- Do staff members and stakeholders from various backgrounds feel that they have equal voice and shared power in decision-making processes?
- Do staff members and stakeholders from various backgrounds feel a sense of belonging in our workplace?
- Are our programs and services culturally relevant to the stakeholders that we serve? Who decides?

These organizations ensure that staff are living out their values and mindsets through equitable practices

EXAMPLE:

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY



These organizations support educators in implementing critical pedagogy such as:

- Using curriculum that is transparent and informative about systems of oppression, and utilizes this to affirm identities
- Using assessments that capture a wide range of skills such as communication, critical thinking and creative problem-solving
- Establishing more equal and collaborative relationship dynamics between and among teachers and students
- Co-creating curriculum and instruction with students
- Encouraging students to provide feedback on teacher practices
- Practicing Socratic questioning to support critical thinking and consciousness raising

EXAMPLE:

MODELING



These organizations support educators in modeling the practices that they hope to see from their students such as:

- Engaging in purposeful self-disclosure and authentic dialogue
- In one professional development session called ‘Filling the Well,’ the organization embedded opportunities for participants to practice mindfulness and centering activities as well as times of connection (sometimes accompanied by a DJ)
- In many *exalt* lessons, the teacher must model vulnerability. For example, in creating a “Self-Assessment Shield,” the lesson requires the teacher to spend time thinking about how to present an aspect of their life in a way that creates a healthy concern and awareness around what happens when a young person makes decisions based on Family, Social and Cultural forces that can lead to death and/or jail (like Tupac)

These organizations believe that youth voice is a critical element of learning and development

DESCRIPTION



These organizations do not view youth as recipients to be “acted upon” or “taught”, but rather as learning and teaching partners with adults.

EXAMPLE:

YOUTH VOICE



These organizations redistribute power to historically marginalized youth by inviting their voice and amplifying their perspectives:

- **LiberatED:** Four BIPOC high school **student panelists** spoke in a recent webinar titled “Reframing Learning Loss” and through sharing their expertise, experiences and poetry, they challenged the widespread, deficit perspective around the “learning loss” that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Beloved Community:** Through their equity audit process, Beloved Community conducts community focus groups and interviews with **students**, parents and staff to ensure that these voices and their visions for their community inform school leaders' decision-making

“How do we get our students to be autonomous participants in a world where they’re susceptible to state violence?”

–exalt

These organizations leverage youth expertise in guiding and advancing their own learning and development

EXAMPLE:

YOUTH EXPERTISE



These organizations position historically marginalized youth as experts in guiding their own learning and development:

- **LiberatED:** They are working to launch a Youth Leaders Program which is a ten-month fellowship that provides **youth activists** an opportunity to partner with LiberatED educators and researchers who are committed to creating culturally affirming school programming and evaluation
- **exalt:** Educators at *exalt* honor the role of youth in playing an equally important role as adults in their own learning and development by validating and drawing “upon our **students’ experiences, ideas and goals** to shape discussions and inform class lessons.” In their curriculum guide, they state that they aim to “**draw on our participants’ high levels of creativity and resilience** and give them productive outlets and mechanisms through which they can channel this energy and talent”¹

“We have a systems approach that centers Black children, who are the co-creators of what a system looks like and feels like in service of them. In doing that, all children will benefit.”

–Kingmakers of Oakland

We also looked at other examples from the field that attend to the learning environment with a focus on racial justice, and found they embody similar guiding principles

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Adult mindsets and behaviors play a critical role in shaping the learning environment

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For each guiding principle, we provide...



This icon is used to mark district or school-level examples rooted in racial justice



This icon is used to mark examples of other models rooted in racial justice

At Joy Village School, Black children learn in an environment of cultural safety and affirmation

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

JOY VILLAGE SCHOOL



The Joy Village School is a private school in Athens, GA that centers the joy and thriving of Black youth in grades K-8.

The Joy Village School’s purpose is to catalyze Black liberation. “By providing a space of Black ownership, Joy Village is restoring agency to Black Athenians to design the conditions of our own flourishing. **The native brilliance of the Black community is given free reign here,** allowing us to recapture the spirit of excellence and joy that once permeated our educational community.”

Their mission is to create joyful learning experiences for Black Youth. “The Joy Village School is designed to be a learning environment of cultural safety and affirmation where Black children can learn and grow joyfully.”

At the inaugural opening of Joy Village School, “the day began for students with a procession to the school building with their parents, teachers, and supporters – their village. Instruments were played as the village sang “Funga Alafia,” with its words coming from the West African Yoruba language, meaning “welcome, in peace we greet you.” Each student was then “asked to step forward and [they were] given a direct message individually: **“There's a place in our village that only you can fill. We need your gifts. We celebrate you. We will support you. And we welcome you to the village.”** The students then crossed a threshold to signify a new beginning.”¹

Latinx educators at the Acero Charter Schools network in Chicago led a co-design process to create a humanities curriculum that better served their student population

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

ACERO CHARTER SCHOOLS



The Acero Charter Schools network in Chicago was started by Latino community organizers. In 2016, however, Evan Gutierrez, a Latinx educator overseeing the curriculum department, noticed that their existing humanities curriculum was inadequate. He noted the sobering reality that “[their] network’s 99-percent Latino population might never read the Latino authors their schools were named for or engage with the inspiring Latino histories they deserved to know.”

In response, Evan Gutierrez “**gathered teachers from across the network to map new social studies standards and develop a vision for culturally relevant curriculum.** What started with one summer teacher cohort doing curriculum design led to more comprehensive curriculum work. Curriculum maps led to units of study, which led to teacher pilots, which led to professional learning.”

A group of educators, the majority of whom were people of color, “came together to research, meet with Latino Studies scholars, dig for sources and design units of study that were rigorous [and] standards-aligned. Most importantly these units centered students’ identities and experiences, presented them with content [that] they were owed and were designed to build students’ agency.”¹

At Toronto Freedom School, a 3-week summer program, Black youth participants experience liberatory educational experiences that affirm their brilliance and beauty

OTHER
MODELS
ROOTED IN
RACIAL
JUSTICE:

TORONTO
FREEDOM
SCHOOL



The Freedom School is a 3-week summer program for youth in Toronto with a team comprised of Movement for Black Lives community educators, parents and caregivers.

Co-founding director and educator, LeRoi Newbold, states that they “wanted to create somewhere that could ground Black children in love and teach them about political education, [and] resistance to anti-Black racism in past generations and current.”

At the Freedom School, they seek to teach “kids that Black is beautiful and to love themselves. Not only that Black skin is beautiful, but Black people, history, experiences, culture and family is beautiful.”

At the Freedom School, educators **respect and affirm “the power that kids have to envision another world** and to envision a future that could be different for Black people.” Hence, youth participate in activities that ask them to respond to questions like “If you got to create a world for Black people, what would it be like?”

Newbold states that “It’s one of the most inspiring projects that we work on because we’re able to see what is possible for our Black kids and youth outside of a system that has a lot of restraints and barriers. We’re able to see the **brilliance and engagement and ingenuity and creativity of our kids** in another setting, and that gives us a lot of energy to be able to go back and make interventions that are necessary into the system, and it also gives us a place where we can do research about what are the best practices of Black education.”¹

Community schools across California embody what it means for education to be rooted in racial justice and care

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



At the UCLA Community School, teachers implement **affirming pedagogical strategies** and **meaningful activities rooted in developing the knowledge and practices to advance racial justice**

- For example, middle schoolers are engaged in interdisciplinary units of study that begin with questions of identity, colorism, Black Lives Matter, and will culminate with a focus on community health and well-being.
- In social studies, 9th grade students are exploring how their identities have been shaped by society and are responding to essential questions such as: “Why is our world the way it is today?” “How did we get here?” and, “How do we change it?” A final “social action project” will ask students to teach Los Angeles history to younger students from an indigenous, decolonial perspective.¹

At Social Justice Humanitas Academy at Cesar Chavez, “teachers [will] better **connect interdisciplinary project-based learning to students’ current experiences and struggles in light of COVID-19 and the fight for racial justice** while actively preparing them to shape their life beyond high school” all while using an abolitionist teaching framework.

“At Humanitas Academy for Art and Technology (HAAT) at Esteban Torres High School, teachers are integrating healing-centered strategies within their classroom practice and curricula. Through healing-centered strategies, HAAT teachers aim to support collective well-being and **provide students with the opportunity to participate in “practices of possibility” that enable students to dream and imagine a hopeful future, to reflect critically on the inequities that lead to the traumas experienced by the community, and to take actions that address these inequities.**”¹

Community-based organizations, like Homies Empowerment, are designing educational spaces that advance racial justice and related components like healing and liberation

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

HECHOS



Homies Empowerment is an independent, grassroots community-based organization out of East Oakland. They started as an after-school program taking on an approach and a way of seeing gang-impacted youth through an asset-based lens.

Currently, their team is working to develop “HECHOS, Homies Empowerment Community High for Our Success, a **community school** for youth who have been pushed out of traditional schools.”

HECHOS “exists to welcome home resilient youth impacted by systemic oppression. They do so with revolutionary love, wraparound holistic resources, and academic support as they further develop the scholar, warrior, healer and hustler within, towards **individual and community emancipation and self-determination.**”¹

After-school or summer literacy programs rooted in racial justice, like 1619 Freedom School or Black is Lit, emphasize how literacy and education can serve greater purposes like healing and liberation

OTHER MODELS ROOTED IN RACIAL JUSTICE:

1619 FREEDOM SCHOOL AND BLACK IS LIT



1619 Freedom School:

- “The 1619 Freedom School is a five-days-a-week, after-school program dedicated to delivering intensive literacy instruction and a culturally responsive curriculum to bridge the academic opportunity gap among low-income public school students in Waterloo, Iowa.”
- Their “motto, **“Liberation Through Literacy,”** resides within the Black tradition of belief that education is the key to freedom and seeks to remind [their] children and [their] community that they come from a heritage of Black people who so believed in the power of literacy that they risked their lives for literacy during slavery, when it was illegal for Black Americans to learn to read and write.”¹

Black is Lit

- Black is Lit is an after-school program “inspired by the concepts of “Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy” author Dr. Gholdy E. Muhammad who says **literacy is liberation and education is a form of empowerment.**”
- At Black is Lit, they believe that “that literacy is an act of liberation and essential to ensuring academic success for Black students. They are unwavering in their belief that Black students are inherently brilliant and that Black Genius awakens in culturally inclusive learning spaces that demand excellence.”²

Californians for Justice youth leaders work with staff in their high schools to develop and leverage the power of authentic relationships as a foundation for racial justice

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

RELATIONSHIP -CENTERED SCHOOLS IN EAST SIDE UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT



“Californians for Justice is a statewide youth-powered organization fighting to improve the lives of communities of color, immigrant, low-income, LGBTQ and other marginalized communities.”

Through their Relationship Centered Schools Campaign, “Californians for Justice youth leaders identified that caring relationships with educators were the key to ensuring students, especially students of color, feel like they belong, are believed in, and are supported to succeed in college, career, and community life. Unfortunately, school climate surveys show that 1 in 3 students in California cannot name a single caring adult on campus.”

Californians for Justice is collaborating with four high schools in the “East Side Union High School District...that are committed to **building relationships as the foundation for racial equity.**” Most East Side students come from immigrant families, and nearly all students are first generation college students.

“Students are working together with administrators and teachers through design teams to identify ways they can create a culture of positive relationships on campus. From master schedule changes and additional teacher professional development, to placing greater value on student voice in school policy and hiring decisions, our teams are working to ensure that teachers and students alike feel safe, supported and capable of thriving at school.”¹

Microschools, like the ones created by Black Mothers Forum, can be a way to establish a learning community that is safe from white supremacy

OTHER
MODELS
ROOTED IN
RACIAL
JUSTICE:

MICRO-
SCHOOLS AND
BLACK
MOTHERS
FORUM



“Founded by mothers long concerned about the safety and welfare of their Black children, Black Mothers Forum (BMF) is an Arizona-based education advocacy group that responded to the COVID-19 crisis by launching two microschools for Black families in Phoenix, Arizona, in January 2021. BMF partnered with Prenda, a well-known microschool provider, but adapted their model to better meet the needs of Black families.”

“The microschools they created made students and their families feel safer, more affirmed, and more engaged than their prior school experiences.”

“Black students make up 5 percent of the student population in Arizona. Multiple parents shared that their children were the only Black students in their previous schools. **Having a space where all the educators and most peers are Black seems to protect students from experiencing racial discrimination and trauma in the school setting.**”

“Many parents described the challenges with their children’s previous schools. Mothers of Black boys seemed to constantly deal with discipline issues and their sons being singled out. Parents expressed how negative school encounters placed an emotional toll on the family. Enrolling their children in the microschools brought a sense of security from knowing that their child was in a learning environment where they were **physically and emotionally safe.**”¹

In other cases, some families have turned to homeschooling, in community with others, to ensure that their children's learning experiences are safe from white supremacy

OTHER
MODELS
ROOTED IN
RACIAL
JUSTICE:

HOME
SCHOOLING
AND
ENGAGED
DETROIT



“Homeschooling increased nationwide after the pandemic disrupted in-person learning...[and] the increase was most significant among Black families, about 3.3% of whom were homeschooling in spring 2020. By fall 2020, 16.1% were homeschooling, according to the survey... While COVID-19 was a catalyst, many Black parents, **concerned about racism in schools** and frustrated by the prevalence of white-washed history lessons, have turned to homeschooling as a way to take control of their children’s education.”

As homeschooling has become more prevalent, so have curriculum resources and support groups like Engaged Detroit. Engaged Detroit, is “a cooperative of 32 Black homeschool families, formed in August 2020 to share resources and coordinate coaching support for parents, helping them learn how to best lead their students in their studies. Homeschools were self-funded and family operated, with families creating their own curriculum, subject to the state’s homeschool laws and regulations. Engaged Detroit hired former homeschoolers to serve as parent coaches, mentoring parents on constructing learning goals and objectives for their children that reflected each family’s values and helping parents create and select academic curriculum and supplementary materials and extracurricular activities.”

“Homeschooling has become such a refuge for many families, Black families in particular, that they don’t have to go to the under-resourced school that they were assigned,” says Cheryl Fields-Smith, an associate professor at the University of Georgia’s Mary Frances Early College of Education, who has researched homeschooling among Black families. “They have an option where someone can create for them a really **positive, nurturing, learning environment.**”¹

Unschooling, a specific version of homeschooling, is another approach that some families use to ensure that learning spaces are safe from white supremacy

OTHER MODELS ROOTED IN RACIAL JUSTICE:

UN-SCHOOLING AND MY REFLECTION MATTERS



My Reflection Matters (MRM) Village “is a nationwide, virtual network of parents, students, and educators, formed with a mission to “cultivate a space that provides the supports, conversations, and healing required to decolonize adults’ beliefs and practices around learning and parenting in order to raise free people.” Initially an in-person, local organization, MRM launched its virtual “Village” platform in August 2020 to connect and support primarily Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families.”

Through an unschooling approach, “the community empowers each individual student to take ownership over their own learning, at their own pace, with the support of caring adults.”

MRM founder Morales-James states that “MRM is not necessarily against the concept of a school. We are against coercive, oppressive learning practices. Unfortunately, schools tend to perpetuate those practices.”

One MRM parent states that “**I couldn’t continue to be in spaces that were dominated by white supremacy** or dominated in a way that really didn’t uphold my child or didn’t really honor him as an individual.”

“For parents who have had negative or even traumatizing experiences in white-dominated institutions—both personally and through their children—it is healing to have the emotional space to process that with other parents from marginalized perspectives and to trade resources and tools to educate their children in a BIPOC-centered way.”¹

Pittsburgh Public Schools plans to reduce racial disparities throughout their district by intentionally attending to adult mindsets and practices

DISTRICT EXAMPLE:

PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS



In 2019, Pittsburgh Public Schools published their implementation plan titled *On Track to Equity: Integrating Equity Throughout PPS* which “seeks to reduce racial disparities throughout the District and elevate the achievement levels of African American students.”

Many of the action items in their *On Track to Equity* implementation plan intentionally attend to adult mindsets and practices:

- Provide equity trainings where adults engage “thoughtful, compassionate exploration of race and racism and grapple with how each influences the culture and climate of our schools. Attendees practice using strategies for identifying and addressing policies, programs, and practices that negatively impact students of color and serve as barriers to ALL students receiving a world-class education”
- Improve indicators of effectiveness on the teacher effectiveness rubric (i.e., RISE) related to implementing lessons equitably as well as related professional development around culturally relevant pedagogy
- Integrate the Courageous Conversations about Race™ protocol into professional learning experiences
- Model classroom-based examples of culturally relevant pedagogy in practice, including within the design and delivery of professional learning
- Provide accompanying tools for educator use in understanding culturally relevant pedagogy at each phase of the teaching and learning process: planning, teaching, observing, conferencing, feedback, and reflection¹

The Center for Black Educator Development increases teacher diversity and attends to teacher mindsets and practices

OTHER
MODELS
ROOTED IN
RACIAL
JUSTICE:

THE CENTER
FOR BLACK
EDUCATOR
DEVELOP-
MENT



The Center for Black Educator Development is an organization that works to increase the number of Black educators. However, they know that a diverse teaching workforce in and of itself is not enough. They believe that “the practice of education itself must be rethought and unshackled.” Their vision is three-fold:

- All Black students will have consistent access to high quality, same race teachers throughout their PreK-12 experience.
- Teachers who do not share the same cultural backgrounds as their students will **demonstrate high levels of expertise in cultural responsive practices and anti-discriminatory mindsets and habits.**
- Professional learning, pipeline, policies, and pedagogy will be aligned to ensure greater educator diversity, cultural responsiveness, and improved student outcomes.

They use four main strategies to work toward their vision:

- Teaching pathways: Recruit talented Black men and women to advance social and racial justice by pursuing a career in education. From high schoolers and college students to people seeking career changes.
- Professional learning: Help all educators—and especially Black educators—excel by developing the **skills, will, and mindset** it takes to master the type of teaching that breaks cycles of social oppression for Black children and other disenfranchised students.
- Cultural pedagogy: Develop and promote curricula, materials, and instruction sourced in perspectives on student learning, classroom practices, and school leadership historically prevalent in the Black community and our culture.
- Public policy: Advocate for local, state and federal interventions that support educational equity, teacher diversity, and pedagogy built on the foundation of traditional Black teaching principles and practices.¹

At ListoAmerica, STEM educators embody the mindsets and implement the practices necessary in creating safe and culturally sustaining STEM spaces for youth of color

OTHER
MODELS
ROOTED IN
RACIAL
JUSTICE:

LISTO-
AMERICA



ListoAmerica is non-profit organization based in Orange County, CA, which provides innovative, out-of-school learning environments where teens, primarily Latinx students, “work with STEAM-Ready adult mentors to explore their ideas, develop new skills, and build confidence in themselves through the use of technology.”

Juliana and Lisa, two women of color educators who lead ListoAmerica programs in their schools, embody the mindsets and implement the practices necessary in creating safe and culturally sustaining STEM spaces for youth of color.

These educators are **committed to protecting and uplifting their students**, and readily leverage “community cultural wealth...to challenge and transform the STEM learning environment [and beyond].” For example, they “provide students with frequent opportunities to discuss, process, and heal from everyday racism” in society, school and in STEM. Furthermore, they **take action in the face of racism**. For example, Juliana intervened to ensure that one of her former Latinx students, a DACA student, was not forced to pay international student fees which would have pushed him out of his collegiate STEM major.

“In addition to **protecting, affirming, and supporting students of color**, they [are] intentional about fostering students’ critical consciousness through race-conscious and justice-oriented STEM education. For instance, after realizing how the hotel industry was exacerbating pollution and environmental racism in the local community, Lisa designed a unit that helped students research and “fight back” against corporations that were disproportionately polluting and exploiting low-income communities of color.”¹

IntegrateNYC's youth leaders on the District 15 Middle School Youth Council work with educators across the district to create more equitable school environments

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

DISTRICT 15 MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH COUNCIL



The District 15 (D15) Middle School Youth Council “connects students from different schools in D15 to build relationships, share experiences, learn about equity and integration, and to **create more inclusive school communities** together.”

They “started meeting in 2018 in order to aid in the implementation of the D15 Diversity Plan, and to work with students and educators in ensuring that [their] school communities truly became more inclusive as the schools welcomed more representative demographics.”

The youth leaders are working to build “more integrated and equitable schools - in the words of the youth - schools that are inclusive, safe, welcoming, and joyful!”

They “meet monthly (virtually) with educators and teachers across D15 (currently MS 839, MS 51, MS 447, Park Slope Collegiate, and IS 136 Dewey) in Community Gatherings that are planned entirely by students, for students.”

Since they “began meeting, [they] have welcomed over 200 students and educators to our Community Gatherings. In 2022, [their] focus is on defining and create school safety in [their] middle schools.”¹

At Zuni High School, youth are positioned as experts and as learning partners with adults through their culminating capstone project

SCHOOL EXAMPLE:

ZUNI HIGH SCHOOL



Zuni High School, located on the Pueblo of Zuni Reservation in New Mexico, primarily serves native students. Their use of standardized tests as a metric for graduation did not adequately honor the cultural and linguistic strengths of their student population and did not provide learning experiences that “are critical for students to see an exciting future for themselves.”

In response, they implemented a capstone project as an alternative to high school graduation called the Senior Honors Project. “In this class seniors conduct research on a certain degree or vocation that they would like to pursue after graduation. At the end of the semester, they give their final presentation in front of the panel of judges...This type of exposure to opportunities, self-guided research, and exploration of interest are critical for students to see an exciting future for themselves.”

“The Senior Honors Project not only showcases students’ academic skills, but also their talents and skills...in drawing, pottery, and weaving by bringing their artifacts and crafts. They showcase their medals and achievements in sports and other extracurricular activities. Some of them also participate in some cultural activities in the state that showcase their cultural dances and ceremonies.”

“During their final presentations, students are encouraged to speak their native language in their introduction and also to wear their traditional Zuni regalia and jewelry to show their pride in their culture.”¹

BRAVE is a youth development nonprofit that emphasizes the critical role BIPOC youth play in their own learning and development

OTHER MODELS ROOTED IN RACIAL JUSTICE:

BRAVE



BRAVE, Building Resilience Awareness & Variations of Excellence, “is an innovative youth development nonprofit. [They] equip youth and families of color with core competencies as they navigate institutional oppression and reshape their communities into spaces that provide equitable opportunities.”

Their mission is to “collaborate with youth of color in their learning and development journey—providing experiences and resources for critical thinking, exploring voice, deepening brilliance, and contributing to the health and renewal of their environments, communities, and reshaping systems.”

They “envision youth of color developing courageous and vibrant lives of purpose—leading and contributing to the strength and thriving of communities and environments.”

“BRAVE believes **youth voice is essential**. Youth have the opportunity to explore methods for liberation from the harsh reality of systematic oppression.”

Youth lead “professional development sessions [which] give educators the opportunity to hear from youth directly while engaging their own learning and reflection. Educators gain tools to develop a culturally responsive curriculum and instruction based on feedback from students of color.”¹

4 Implications for the Field

Based on the findings from our research, we offer actionable ideas with relevant resources for funders and district leaders

Reflection questions

How might this information be relevant to education funders as they think about their investment strategy with a focus on racial justice?

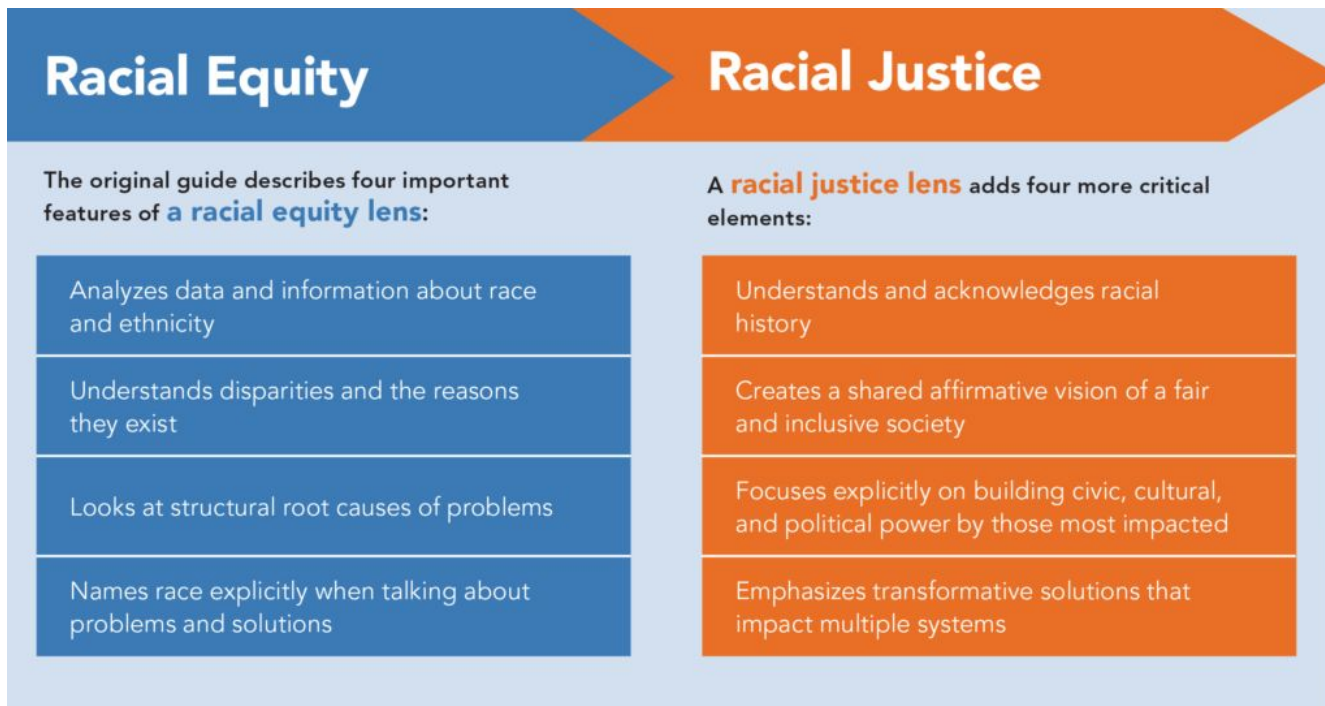
How might this information be relevant to district leaders in promoting learning environments rooted in racial justice?

Education Funders

What is the difference between racial equity and racial justice as it applies to grantmaking?

BACKGROUND:

The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity states that “a racial equity lens separates symptoms from causes, while a racial justice lens brings into view the confrontation of power, the redistribution of resources, and the systemic transformation necessary for real change. The term ‘racial justice’ raises the stakes, elevating the positive vision and power of communities of color and centering fundamental systemic transformations.”¹



1. Sen & Villarosa (2020)

Education Funders

What is the difference between racial equity and racial justice as it applies to grantmaking?

BACKGROUND:

The Schott Foundation for Public Education “positions racial justice grantmaking as a subset of racial equity grantmaking. In other words, all racial justice grantmaking is also classified as racial equity, but not all racial equity grantmaking is considered to be racial justice.” They offer the following distinction between racial equity and racial justice:

- “Racial equity refers to grants designed to close the *achievement gap* that persists between racial groups. Grants for racial equity include support for programs such as racial bias trainings for teachers or mentorship programs for Black and brown students.”
- “Racial justice refers to grants designed to close the *opportunity gap* — the underlying systemic injustices that create the achievement gap in the first place. Racial justice grants focus explicitly on empowering people closest to the problem (families and students) organizing in their communities to change the systems and structures that generate and reinforce racial inequity. Racial justice grantmaking supports building community power, supporting policy change, engaging with policymakers, building partnerships with advocates to advance racial equity.”¹

Education Funders

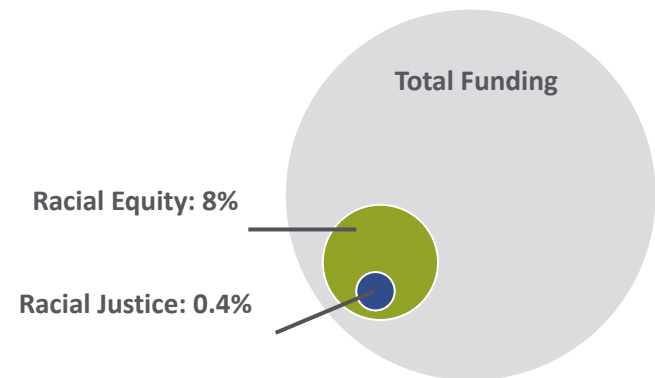
What is the state of racial equity versus racial justice funding?

BACKGROUND:

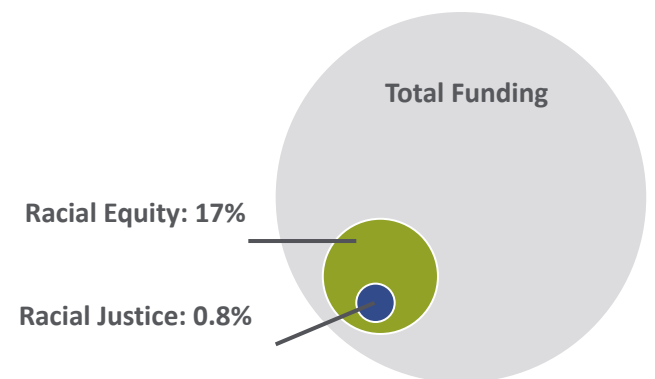
Two different studies* analyzing grants from the Candid database reveal that **both racial equity and racial justice, but particularly racial justice, are underfunded in education philanthropy:**

- The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity found that “of more than \$108 billion in foundation funding devoted to education in 2015–2018, only 8 percent was for racial equity and less than a half percent was for racial justice.”¹
- The Schott Foundation for Public Education found that in the three-year period from 2018 through 2020, education philanthropy disbursed \$14 billion, but just 17 percent of that (\$2.4 billion) went to racial equity, and less than one percent (\$105 million) went to racial justice.²

K–12 Education Philanthropy Grants, 2015–2018



K–12 Education Philanthropy Grants, 2018–2020



*These studies are not comparable as they use different methodologies

1. Cyril et al. (2021); 2. Schott Foundation (2022)

Given this background on the state of racial justice funding in education, we offer some framing considerations before providing recommendations

Philanthropy is not a monolith. There are many different types of foundations (e.g., local, regional, community, family, corporate, etc.). Foundations differ on a wide variety of aspects in their approach to philanthropy and larger strategic approach to education funding. Even within a foundation, there are differences in individual program officer strategies and values.

Please consider the recommendations on the following slides and how you might be able to engage with them in a way that is realistic for your specific context.

We offer recommendations aligned to the five guiding principles from our research

1

Historically marginalized populations have expertise and assets

2

The purpose of education and SEL should include a focus on racial justice and related components like healing and liberation

3

Community, safe from white supremacy and oppression, and authentic relationships are vital to learning

4

Adult mindsets and behaviors play a critical role in shaping the learning environment

5

Youth play an equally important role as adults in their own learning and development

Education Funders

How might education funders think about their investment strategy with a focus on racial justice?

1

Historically marginalized populations have expertise and assets

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Listen to and support BIPOC leaders and staff within your organization and across the field of philanthropy
- Invest long-term in organizations led by and for BIPOC and include them throughout as much of the grantmaking process as possible (e.g., incorporate people proximate to the problem in your strategy development, decision-making, and evaluation)
 - + [CZI and Education First's Primer for Designing and Launching Open RFPs](#) provides guidance on prioritizing equity and transparency with open RFPs
 - + See [research from the Equitable Giving Project](#), highlighting the experiences of those seeking funding from education-focused philanthropic organizations
- Engage (and possibly hire) people from historically underserved communities to inform and monitor the effectiveness of grant funded initiatives

Education Funders

How might education funders think about their investment strategy with a focus on racial justice?

2 The purpose of education and SEL should include a focus on racial justice and related components like healing and liberation

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Engage in critical internal work as a foundation to reflect on how your approach to education grantmaking is inclusive of racial justice, and identify actionable steps your foundation can take to implementing grantmaking strategies with a focus on racial justice
 - + Read [Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity's Practical Guide to Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens](#)
- Consider how you can support organizations in developing their capacity to do racial justice work so that the burden is not only on those organizations who are already leading from a racial justice lens and BIPOC leaders
- Invest in organizations that provide schools/districts with the capacity (time, staff, PD) to attend to racial justice, healing, love and liberation

Education Funders

How might education funders think about their investment strategy with a focus on racial justice?

3 Community, safe from white supremacy and oppression, and authentic relationships are vital to learning

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Engage in critical internal work as a foundation to understand philanthropy's past and current role in perpetuating systemic racism, and to re-envision a new way forward
 - + Read [Edgar Villanueva's Decolonizing Wealth](#) and [Will Coredry's Dear Philanthropy: These Are the Fires of Anti-Black Racism](#) as a team and design action items that reflect where your foundation is currently and how you can take steps toward a new way of working
- Partner with other funders to curate 'virtual salons' where people can meet to discuss issues of equity in education. Note that these salons should be facilitated by experts who can create communities of learning and practice that are safe from white supremacy and oppression
 - + See [Bridgespan Group's Race and Place-based Philanthropy](#) for experiences of place-based funders working alongside communities they serve
- Provide physical, emotional and political protection for racial justice leaders to continue to advocate for racial justice across education systems through strategic grantmaking and providing general operating support for racial justice leaders to self-define how to best protect themselves

Education Funders

How might education funders think about their investment strategy with a focus on racial justice?

4

Adult mindsets and behaviors play a critical role in shaping the learning environment

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Increase your foundation's expertise on the connection between mindsets and habits. This increased expertise could inform the development of a more thorough grantmaking strategy and process
 - + Read [Seizing the Moment: Race Equity Mindsets, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and Outcomes for Students](#) as a team and reflect on implications to your foundation's grantmaking strategy
- Interrogate current and future investments to determine the extent to which they foster a focus on adult mindsets and behaviors
- Commit to understanding the role that adult mindsets and behaviors play and prioritize organizations that are working to shift these through coaching, PD, etc.

Education Funders

How might education funders think about their investment strategy with a focus on racial justice?

5

Youth play an equally important role as adults in their own learning and development

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Fund grants to both enable and highlight ways that youth and adults are currently collaborating to create equitable learning environments
- Support the development of processes, structures and programs that amplify youth voice and leadership
 - + Read [The Sillerman Center's Brief on Youth-Led Grantmaking](#) as a team and consider ways that your foundation could incorporate youth-led grantmaking into your work
- Consider establishing youth philanthropy programs
 - + See [YouthGiving's Program Directory](#) for youth grantmaking programs worldwide

District Leaders

How might this information be relevant to district leaders in promoting learning environments rooted in racial justice?

1

Historically marginalized populations have expertise and assets

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Develop school-community partnerships that directly influence the operation of the school
- Explore models for how to meaningfully engage historically marginalized students and educators as co-designers and partners
 - + See [Achieve the Core's guidance on culturally relevant pedagogy](#) for practical ways to shape pedagogy in a way that affirms the expertise and assets of historically marginalized students
- Provide teacher PD that celebrates historically marginalized populations and the specific instructional strategies that they employ to engage in academic content
 - + See [NoVo Foundation & Education First's Teacher Morale and Retention Grants](#) for how one foundation is supporting district leaders to deeply understand educators and collaborate with them to address the root causes of decreased teacher morale and retention
- Establish principles for decision-making at the senior level and/or board that affirm the expertise and assets of historically marginalized populations. For example, including cultural relevance as a factor when considering curriculum adoption

District Leaders

How might this information be relevant to district leaders in promoting learning environments rooted in racial justice?

2 The purpose of education and SEL should include a focus on racial justice and related components like healing and liberation

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Adopt new models of SEL that are infused with a racial justice and equity lens
- Prioritize and/or transition to assessment practices that focus more on whole-child
- Explore ways to partner with families and community organizations in order to create opportunities for students to experience racial justice and concepts of healing, love and liberation beyond the classroom
 - + See this [case study](#) of how Lister Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington partnered with community liaisons and OST program partners to prioritize racial justice in their SEL efforts
- Establish pre-conditions and supports for adults to have the space and tools to engage students in academic/SEL development as well as attend to healing, love, liberation. For example, protected time in the school day for adults and students to engage in critical discussions
 - + See [Ideas from Experts on How Districts Can Create the Conditions for Sustainable Change](#) and [Education First's Integrating SEAD Action Guide](#)

District Leaders

How might this information be relevant to district leaders in promoting learning environments rooted in racial justice?

3 Community, safe from white supremacy and oppression, and authentic relationships are vital to learning

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Engage in critical internal work as a district to understand the education system's role in perpetuating systemic racism, and to re-envision a new way forward
 - + See [Kingmakers of Oakland Decolonizing School Systems](#) for a case study of how one district advanced racial justice, radical healing, and educational equity across their schools
- Partner with organizations that can provide district leaders with professional learning experiences that allow them to build community and relationships with one another in a purposeful manner
 - + See [Beloved Community's Equity in Schools Cohort](#) which is a community of practice designed to advance equitable practices. The cohort experience includes: coaching for senior leadership teams, Equity Audits, Equity Lens Map, capacity-building services for leadership teams and feedback on the organization's multi-year Equity Work
- Consider how district level policies such as funding or school assignment boundaries may influence schools' efforts to foster comfort and belonging for populations that make up a minority of the school and district population
 - + See [Center for American Progress Fighting Systemic Racism in K12 Education](#)

District Leaders

How might this information be relevant to district leaders in promoting learning environments rooted in racial justice?

4

Adult mindsets and behaviors play a critical role in shaping the learning environment

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Focus the energy of your initiatives on promoting the type of mindsets and behavior you'd like to see in adults
 - + See [Beloved Community's Equity Audit User Guide](#) for a tool that aids organizations/districts/schools in assessing their institutional practices and [Beloved Community's work with New Orleans Public Schools](#) as an example of where to go from there
- Implement PD on a consistent and continuous basis that takes adults through their own SEL and racial identity development including learning about systemic racism. Consider additional coaching for this, and compensate teachers fairly for their time engaging in this work
 - + See [The Equity Collaborative](#) and [Center for Racial Justice in Education](#) for PD resources

District Leaders

How might this information be relevant to district leaders in promoting learning environments rooted in racial justice?

5

Youth play an equally important role as adults in their own learning and development

For each guiding principle, we offer a set of actionable ideas with relevant resources

- Establish processes and structures to incorporate youth voice in decision-making at the school and district level
 - + See [Chicago Public Schools' Student Voice and Activism Fellowship](#) and [Student Voice Committees](#) as an example of one district's way of implementing youth voice in decision making
- Engage youth in providing adult PD
 - + See [Denver Public Schools' Young African American & Latinx Leaders program](#) for an example of student-led PD

5 Appendix

Appendix A: SEL Definitions

Abolitionist, anti-racist and transformative SEL intentionally center racial equity, healing and liberation

TERMINOLOGY

DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION

Abolitionist SEL¹

- Abolitionist SEL is “critical, healing centered, reciprocal in nature, culturally responsive, transformative, and dialogical”
- Abolitionist SEL “models center vulnerability, healing, joy, and community, resist punitive or disciplinary approaches, and do not involve school resource officers or police”
- Abolitionist SEL “is not an isolated lesson. It is a way of being that informs all aspects of teaching, learning, and relationship building with students, families, and communities”

Anti-racist SEL²

- An anti-racist approach to SEL is rooted in racial justice and collective healing.
- Anti-racist SEL aims to “dismantle structural, institutional, and individual practices that harm young people, that inhibit their optimal social, emotional, and academic development”
- Anti-racist SEL posits that “educators and students deserve to express themselves freely without fear, to be treated with respect and valued, to feel safe, and to go to schools that challenge bias, discrimination, and oppression”

Transformative SEL³

- Transformative SEL “is a process whereby young people and adults build strong, respectful, and lasting, relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine root causes of inequity, and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal well-being”
- Transformative SEL aims to “[redistribute] power to promote social justice through increased engagement in school and civic life”

Culturally sustaining, culturally affirming and trauma-informed SEL center personal strengths and collective cultural capital

TERMINOLOGY

DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION

Culturally sustaining SEL¹

- Culturally sustaining SEL is a “a process by which youth, adults, and elders build healthy intersectional identities, foster multicultural competence, forge social and emotional skills, and cultivate critical consciousness with a focus on social action”
- Culturally sustaining SEL “begins with seeing and cultivating the social and emotional competencies, cultural capital wealth and Indigenous ways of knowing that youth and communities already use to meet their needs”

Culturally affirming SEL²

- Culturally affirming SEL is the process through which people “recognize and process emotions, set and strive toward personal/collective goals and liberation while embracing failures as lessons, [and] feel and show empathy”
- Culturally affirming SEL aims to “establish and maintain positive relationships with ourselves, our land, and our community, make collective decisions, identify the intersections between the -isms (including colonialism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, homophobia, cispremacry, linguicism, ableism, and all forms of oppression), and dream the world we deserve into being”

Trauma-informed SEL³

- Trauma-informed SEL “is an approach to fostering youths’ social-emotional development with practices that support all students, but is particularly inclusive and responsive to the needs of children and youth who have experienced trauma”
- Trauma-informed SEL “calls for creating reliable learning environments where students who have experienced adversities and trauma feel supported and connected, are welcome to explore their strengths and identities, can exercise their agency, can develop meaningful, positive relationships with adults and peers and have access to the mental health supports they need”

Appendix B: Founder Stories

Most of the founders of these organizations describe that the impetus for their work is in direct response to a specific traumatic and racist experience



Chris Chatmon's direct experience of the toxic experience for Black males in OUSD led to the spinoff group of Kingmakers (the origin group was the Office of African American Male Achievement)



Dena Simmons felt compelled to launch LiberatED as a response to her experience at Yale and the harm caused by not centering equity in SEL, along with a racial justice and healing component



Rhonda Broussard felt inspired to found Beloved Community after the murder Michael Brown in St. Louis and the civil unrest that followed

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