

Clinical and research understanding of racial trauma has grown over the past decade, as has the recognition of the actual racial trauma experienced by children and youth. During this hour, we'll consider the current statutory environment and the state of clinical research before considering some interventions.

Statutory environment: state-level reaction to the Summer of 2020

During the summer of 2020, worldwide marches and protests followed the brutal murder of George Floyd. In the context of that summer's unrest and the ongoing ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic, which [disproportionately impacted](#) Black, Latino, and Native American communities, many federal and state agencies, schools, and private businesses intensified anti-racist and anti-oppression programming and diversity, equity, and inclusion training for staff and students. Many called for support of anti-racist actions and training.

In response, four months after Floyd's murder, then-President Trump issued [Executive Order 13950](#), "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping." The Order prohibited federal agencies, federal grant recipients, and federal contractors from training that "inculcates" "race or sex stereotyping" or "scapegoating," including a list of prohibited "divisive concepts." A federal court enjoined the EO as unconstitutional, and the Biden Administration withdrew it in January 2021.

Throughout 2021 and into 2022, state legislators have pushed through "divisive concepts" bills that ban the EO "divisive concepts" from K-12 classrooms. As of May 18, 2022, the following states have enacted laws or agency actions, sometimes including the 1619 Project, critical race theory, and other concepts in addition to the ones in the original EO: AL; AR; AZ*; [Florida](#)* (takes effect July 1; a good example of the type); GA*; ID; IA; MS*; ND; NH; OH; OK*; SC; SD; TN; TX*; UT; and VA*. (In the starred states, more than 50% of the population under 18 is BIPOC.) These laws, most enforced against the school district and/or individual teacher, have had the effect of limiting discussions of race in the classroom. For example, in Florida, math textbooks were initially rejected due to the state agency's finding they violated the law, though few "violations" were made public.

Racial trauma, toxic stress, and child maltreatment in the education context

For decades, psychologists and social scientists have studied the impact of race relations and racism within school systems, demonstrating the negative impact on the development and well-being particularly for youth of Color (Clark & Clark, 1947). The most infamous psychological studies, conducted by [Kenneth and Mamie Clark](#) (1947, 1950), highlighted the damaging effects of racial segregation on Black children. Findings were replicated as evidence in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to demonstrate the disparities for Black youth in racially segregated school systems. US Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren cited findings in his writing of the [Court's opinion](#), noting that the legal separation of Black children gave them " a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone." As we consider the implications of "divisive concepts" bills for youth, it is essential to consider the depth and breadth of how race and racism function within schools. To date, sociodemographic data

of public schools offer a continued depiction of racial segregation. The [National Center for Educational Statistics \(NCES\)](#) reported enrollment trends from 2009 to 2020 indicating that students of Color disproportionately attended schools in which the combined enrollment of students of Color was at least 75 percent of the total enrollment. In contrast, 6% of White students attended such schools. More specifically, 46% of White students were enrolled in public schools that were mostly composed of White students (at least 75% of enrollment), while 6% were enrolled in schools in which less than 25% of the students were White. Additionally, whereas youth of Color make up the majority of K-12 public school students, White educators make up 79% or more of the teacher workforce in 37 states across the nation.

The aforementioned data should be interpreted and juxtaposed with the reported experiences of youth of Color in school settings. Youth of color report significant experiences of school-based racial discrimination in a variety of manners. Examples include negative teacher perceptions of their emotions and behavior (e.g., anger, hostility), prejudicial beliefs regarding intelligence and ability, implicit pro-White attitudes exhibited by peers and adults, disproportionate rates of disciplinary actions including suspensions and expulsions, and appraisal of student academic performance is negatively skewed by race, with non-White Latinx and Black students receiving disproportionately low assessments (Irizarry, 2015). Systemically youth of Color also report a lack of exposure to curricular content that is representative of the contributions of people and communities of color across subject areas. Such reports are supported by the [NYC Coalition of Education Justice's](#) 2018 study, which found that educational resources used in schools overwhelmingly lacked racially and ethnically diverse authors and content (e.g., over 90% of some elementary school resources were produced by White authors). "Divisive concepts" bills arguably serve to perpetuate such dynamics.

What is often missing from the research and statistics documenting the race-related experiences of youth of Color is the harm caused to all youth, especially youth of Color. For youth, experiences of racial discrimination are associated with low life satisfaction, negative mental symptoms (e.g., depression, anger, anxiety, hopelessness), health-compromising behaviors (e.g., substance use, violence, delinquency), and poor physical health outcomes (e.g., hypertension, thickening, and calcification of the arteries) (Bennett et al., 2005; Broman, et al., 2000; Landrine & Klonoff, 2000; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Additionally, [Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cabo](#) (2016) posit that when students lack exposure to youth from diverse racial and other social identity backgrounds (e.g., class) there are missed opportunities for improved cognitive skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving that results from exposure to students who are different from themselves.

The aforementioned circumstances are not likely to resolve themselves and require deliberate and intentional efforts to mitigate harm. Thus, an approach of ignorance or disregard for the need for racial literacy and intentional anti-racist educational practices and policies can lead to the perpetuation of racism in all of its forms (i.e., explicit, implicit, direct, or indirect) towards youth of Color (Halberstadt et al., 2018). As noted in APSAC's [Commitment to Eliminate Systemic Racism and Implicit Bias in the Child Maltreatment Field](#), "When directed at [or experienced by] youth, racism is child abuse." For the adults who are aware of such child maltreatment - whether interpersonal, institutional, or systemic - to remain silent and participate in inaction is to be complicit in the facilitation of harm.

Problem of practice

The gunman in the recent massacre of ten Black people in Buffalo was clearly motivated by white supremacy. Yet [many teachers fear telling students these facts due to “divisive concepts” laws](#) in their states. In Arizona, a state legislator said that it [would “not be appropriate” to discuss](#) these motives with students.

1. What are the possible mental and emotional health implications for all students? For Black students specifically?
2. How would you counsel the Arizona state legislator? Would you advise for or against sharing the gunman’s motivations? Why or why not?

Prompts for discussion

1. What is the state of the clinical research on the health impacts of racism on children and youth? How do we begin to apply this research to the school environment?
2. How are these topics included in standard training of psychology, psychiatry, and educational professionals in the United States?

Resources—“Divisive Concepts” statutes

PEN America, [Educational Gag Orders](#) (report downloadable from page); [PEN America Index of Educational Gag Orders](#) (online resource, regularly updated).

[AAPF Truth Be Told Project.](#)

William H. Frey, [Anti-CRT bills are aimed to incite the GOP base—not parents.](#) Brookings Institution, March 30, 2022 (report and tables downloadable at the link).

[Spotlight on Critical Race Theory.](#) EducationWeek (page collecting sources and providing free download).

[Persyn Law & Policy resource collection.](#)

Resources—Racial trauma as child maltreatment

[#racialtraumaisreal](#)

Jernigan et al., 2015

[Talking With Children About Race and Racism](#)

Lingras, K. A. (2021). Talking with children about race and racism. *Journal of health service psychology, 47*(1), 9-16.

[How age and race affect the frequency, timing, and content of conversations about race with children](#)

Sullivan, J., Wilton, L., & Apfelbaum, E. P. (2022). How age and race affect the frequency, timing, and content of conversations about race with children. *Child Development.*

[Healing Interpersonal and Racial Trauma: Integrating Racial Socialization Into Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for African American Youth](#)

Metzger, I. W., Anderson, R. E., Are, F., & Ritchwood, T. (2021). Healing interpersonal and racial trauma: Integrating racial socialization into trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for African American youth. *Child maltreatment, 26*(1), 17-27.

[Healing the Hidden Wounds of Racial Trauma](#)

Hardy, K. V. (2013). Healing the hidden wounds of racial trauma. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 22*(1), 24.

[EmbraceRace](#)

[Resources for talking about race, racism, and racialized violence with kids.](#)

[J&A Resources for Racial Trauma and the Black Community](#)